



# I'll be seeing you

by **HENRY BARRY**

Engulfed in darkness,  
a totally blinded veteran tells the  
inspiring story of how he sought  
and found a new life

# I'll be seeing you

*How* does a man survive the catastrophe of sudden, total blindness?

*How* does he first react? How and with what resources does he fight against the first rush of panic and dark fears?

*And* if he is young and strong and active, how does he summon the courage to face the long years ahead?

*How* does he adjust physically? How does he learn to walk about, to dress and to eat, to light a cigarette, and to fall without hurting himself? How does he know where he is or to whom he is talking?

*Then,* emotionally, how does he learn to live with people? Will he forever be a burden on those who love him? Will he require so much attention that it would be better never to return to his family? How can he face pity?

[continued on back flap]

# How I Feel

APRIL 20, 1952

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family - 12  
marriage p. 13,  
14.

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[continued on back flap]

# How I Feel About It

I'LL BE SEEING YOU. By Henry M. Barry. 239 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$3.

By BAYNARD KENDRICK

**"P**PRIVATE HENRY BARRY, aged 31, stood on the deck of a troopship in Boston Harbor. \* \* \* The sun was hot and all the seagulls in New England had come to see us off. They dove into the harbor and perched in droves along the pier and on the fishing boats. There was a ring of barnacles around each pile where it stuck out of the water and the old pier was bleached white by the sun and salt. U. S. A. was written over everything.

"One of my buddies, leaning on the rail next to me, said: 'Take a long, last look, Barry.'

" 'That's what I'm doing, Desmond, that's what I'm doing. That old pier is the last thing I'll see in this country for a long time. In fact, it's probably the last thing I'll ever see in this country, period!'

It was the last thing Mr. Barry ever saw in this country with his eyes! But you'll miss an intense and heart-warming experience if you fail to read in Mr. Barry's own words the new things he has seen since he was blinded by shellfire on the German front.

This reviewer worked with more than 700 blinded veterans of World War II at Valley Forge, Old Farms Convalescent Hospital, Avon, Conn., and Dibble Hospital in California. Mr. Barry's book, written with skill and feeling, has brought back keen recollections. "This is a funny deal [he writes], you know it? It's hard to put into words, but it's something like this: I'm blind. Nothing and nobody can ever change that. But what I do about it, how I feel about it, even how others feel, is something over which I personally have full control. I can make myself happy or I can make myself sad."

**T**HEY may have blown away quite a lot of Mr. Barry in France (he has three Purple Hearts), but they never touched his brains or guts. Not only has he made himself happy, but he has turned out a creative piece of work that will make any reader happy, no matter how low that reader may feel.

Mr. Barry says: "It's hard to put into words!" But by his ease of style and his understanding of others he has proved himself a writer. The public, like this reviewer, is bound to want more. Mr. Barry's scenes are vividly created; his prose is economical and moving; his humor is real because it stems from high courage. There's more stimulation in "I'll Be Seeing You" than in a bottle of twenty-year-old bourbon, and it's cheaper, too.

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*Mr. Kendrick received the Robert Meltzer Award from the Screen Writers Guild for the picture "Bright Victory," adapted from his novel "Lights Out."*



**AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND  
15 WEST 16th STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10011**

family - 12  
marriage p. 13,  
14.











-p. 49-50  
Family 124-129  
Cruelty of society p 129-131, 132  
effect of time. p 135, 136  
effect of winter p 144

I'LL BE SEEING YOU



# I'LL BE SEEING YOU

B Y

*HENRY M. BARRY*



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FIRST EDITION

**T O**  
**ALL BLINDED VETERANS**  
**OF AMERICA**



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I'LL BE SEEING YOU



## CHAPTER ONE

WE HAD fought through the little German town and had reached the farthest edge, when I spotted a camouflaged tank destroyer loaded with the enemy. I opened fire and saw several Germans drop. My lieutenant shouted for me to run for cover, and as I headed toward an old building, I wondered if I had hit the gunner. I turned to duck over the curb when something pinged against my head.

At first there was only a fog around me; then the pain started. It was a pain that crashed and thumped inside my head. My temples felt shivery.

My skull was tight and red-hot. Outside my head the rumble of tanks and crackling gunfire went on.

In the confusion I heard Stubbs yell: "Just a little farther, Barry. Crawl just a little farther."

I turned my head to speak to Stubbs, but I couldn't see him. Frantically I moved my head from side to side. Men were talking; I recognized the voices, but I couldn't see the men. I couldn't see anything.

"Now turn this way, up over the curbstone." Stubbs was beside me. I tried to follow his directions, but I was distracted by my inability to see. My mouth had filled with blood, and as I crept over the curbstone I felt suddenly like throwing up.

I heard the sound of a voice. "Stubbs, it's his right leg. The bone is sticking out through the skin and is jammed into the curb."

Vaguely I wondered whose leg he was talking about, but it didn't make any real difference. When I could think at all, the only thing I wanted

to know was why I couldn't see. Then I felt myself lifted, carried a short distance, and laid gently on the ground. I heard Smitty talking and turned my head in that direction. "Smitty," I begged, "what's wrong with my eyes?"

His answer came back fast. "That shell hit one of the Germans in the back and his flesh was blown all over the place. Some of it's plastered across your eyes. You better sit tight and wait for a doctor to clean it off."

"Thanks, Smitty." The mystery of why I couldn't see had been solved; there was nothing to do now but wait for the medics. The noises still thundered in my mind, and the pain in my head was shattering. Stubbs wouldn't talk to me at all. I learned later that it was because of the way I looked; my face was torn to shreds and my legs were like broken sticks. Stubbs knew, of course, why I couldn't see. One eye was covered with blood and the other was half out of the socket.

After a while the medics came. They placed me

on a stretcher and slid me into an ambulance. A hypodermic put me to sleep.

I woke up, I don't know where. A field hospital, probably. The first thing I did was to put my hands up to my eyes; they were swathed in bandages. For one awful second I was panicky; then I remembered what Smitty had told me and felt reassured that the blindness would only be temporary. I didn't even wonder why they hadn't just taken off the dead German's flesh or why they'd bothered to bandage my eyes. I was worried then about my legs, both of which were covered with plaster casts. The noises in my head weren't so loud now and I floated off again into a drugged sleep.

A moment of consciousness on a hospital train, then nothing more until I heard someone say: "Paris." I was hustled into an ambulance. I don't remember arriving at the hospital or being put to bed. The first thing I heard was a feminine voice with a French accent.

“You are a heavy sleeper, monsieur. Please do not move. You are being given a blood transfusion.”

“Never mind the transfusion,” I told her. “Just get the doctor. I want to ask some questions that won’t wait.”

“*Oui, monsieur,*” and she hurried off.

In a little while a firm hand rested on my shoulder and a pleasant voice said: “How are you feeling, son? You’ve had us worried. I’m Major Trasker, an eye doctor. The nurse said you had some questions.”

“My eyes, doc, my eyes! What’s the idea of the bandages? When are you going to clean off my eyes? Did that dead Jerry’s flesh hurt my eyes?”

Gentle fingers removed the bandages. My heart beat so fast that I could hardly breathe. I kept looking ahead at nothing but blackness. Finally I realized that it was very quiet around me. Slowly I reached up my hand and touched my eyes. I felt the skin around them. The bandages were off and

still there was nothing but darkness. I grabbed at the doctor. "Doc, tell me—how do they look? Is the Jerry's skin stuck to them? I've waited long enough for somebody to explain."

"Take it easy, son. Relax so that I can examine them. You said something about a dead German's flesh. I'm afraid I don't understand."

I lay back on the bed. Smitty had lied to me. I felt nothing at all, just a sort of numbness, as the doctor went on talking.

"Your right eye has been badly damaged. I'll have to operate on it tomorrow morning and the chances are that I'll have to remove it. About the left eye we can be more optimistic. When you hear me click on my light, tell me whether you see anything. Don't be frightened if you can't see. There's a hemorrhage behind the eye and it may take weeks for it to clear."

I could feel the perspiration break out on my face. The light clicked on. At first I kept my eyes shut. My lips were dry and a pounding had started

in my throat. Then I opened my eyes wide, straining to see the little light. Not the tiniest ray came through; a small finger of fright crawled up my spine. I tried so hard to see the light that my whole body ached. I had to see it, but I couldn't. I reared up on my elbows, still staring ahead. The doctor put his hand back on my shoulder and suddenly I remembered what he'd said: not to be frightened if I couldn't see. I gulped a swallow of air and dropped back on the bed. "It must be the hemorrhage, doc. I can't see a thing."

The doctor's footsteps grew fainter as he moved away from me down the ward. He wouldn't lie to me. It was the hemorrhage that kept me from seeing. But tomorrow morning when I came from the operating-room I'd have only one eye. Me with only one eye. What would it look like? Would it be obvious, so that other people would stare at it? Maybe the lost eye would be replaced by one that I'd have to take out and put back in again. I fought against the idea, trying to concentrate on the

sounds that had been fringing my thoughts. Somewhere in the ward a man was whistling in a monotone and, close by, another person was absent-mindedly keeping time by tapping a glass with something that sounded like a spoon. Men were talking in voices that were noncommittal, indifferent to my unhappiness.

The rest of that day is pretty vague. One minute I'd be thanking God for one good eye and the next I'd be cursing the Devil for the loss of the other one. At one point someone gave me a couple of drags from a cigarette. Later a drinking-tube was stuck between my lips and I sucked up some coffee. Most of the time I lay in a half-awake stupor.

The next morning when I came to, my right eye was gone. I had more or less expected it, but I began to cry. I could taste the tears on my mouth; then I realized that they ran down only the left side of my face. I wasn't crying; I was only half-crying. I tried to think of something to hold onto,

so, like every other G.I., I thought of home. In the U.S.A. there were great surgeons, big hospitals, wonder drugs. In America my other eye could be saved.

Soon the doctor came over to my bed. "Doc," I said, "when can I go home?"

There was a smile in his voice when he answered. "Tomorrow morning you're being flown to England, son. They'll fly you home from there."

I'm an ordinary person from an ordinary town. As the song says, you could pass me on the street and never notice me. I come from a small city south of Boston called Brockton, which is notable, if you can call it that, for its shoe factories. It's a busy town, a sort of dirty town, but it's under my skin.

In my town the children skate all winter and swim all summer. We used to play sandlot baseball, touch football, and stoop tag like youngsters everywhere else. Once in a while we'd

break somebody's window or chalk up sidewalks, and then we'd run away. Almost everybody worked in the shoe factories, and while we all dreamed of bigger and better things, that's where most of us wound up.

My town had been particularly hard hit during the depression, and I grew up knowing what it meant to fight for a dollar. We never had enough money or quite enough time to do what we wanted. I slugged my way through fierce, childish battles and struggled with schoolbooks up into junior high school.

Then I had to quit school to go to work. We were a big family—there were six of us—and the time had come when if we wanted to eat we had to work. I didn't care too much, because the only thing I liked about school was reading. I read everything I could lay my hands on and used to take a lot of teasing from friends for going around with my pockets bulging with books.

I went from job to job. Money was tight, any job hard to get, and there was little security in any of them. I worked as a waiter in Atlantic City, as a counterman in New York, for the Brooklyn Edison Company; and from 1941 to 1943 I was the best heeler in any shoe factory in Brockton.

When I was twenty, I married. My wife was wonderfully co-operative about moving from one place to another, but it was hard for her, particularly after the boys were born. Donny came along in 1935, and in 1937 Henry Jr. was born. Except that Don's eyes were blue, the boys looked a lot alike. They were lean, dark-haired youngsters with quick smiles and eager minds. Both of them have always had a peculiarly adult understanding of hardship and deprivation, but they knew how to enjoy themselves too, and there were some good times.

I worked hard and I played hard in those days. Loudness and cynicism and arrogance were the

fashion of the times. The more a man bragged about what he'd do if he were running things, the more welcome he was among men.

Moving around so much in search of work was hard on my wife, as I have said, but my attitude must have been harder. I built up a shell of bravado and disdain to cover my shortcomings as a wage-earner. I acted the big shot to hide my inability to get a steady job and give my wife and family the things I wanted them to have. I guess I wasn't easy to live with.

As time went on, I grew closer to the boys and farther from my wife. Finally, in 1942, she and I decided to separate. We did all we could to settle things without recrimination. Then the boys went to live with their mother. Cutting them out of my life was the hardest thing I'd ever had to do, but they certainly needed her more than they did me. I kept on trying to be with them as often as possible, a difficult feat under the circumstances. At any rate, I began to realize more fully the impor-

tance of looking after a family. Almost overnight I learned the significance of humility.

When war broke out, I figured I knew all there was to know about the rough side of life. I was tough and cocky and, though I didn't know it then, I was just beginning to see a lot of things in their true light.

On July 1, Private Henry Barry, aged thirty-one, stood on the deck of a troopship in Boston Harbor. I'd been through basic training in South Carolina, then transferred to a camp in Massachusetts. That day, as the big ship edged away from the dock, I remembered the heat and the night problems and the grueling hikes. I remembered the squawks and the discomfort, the laughs and the bull sessions. The sun was hot and all the sea-gulls in New England had come to see us off. They dove into the harbor and perched in droves along the pier and on the fishing boats. There was a ring of barnacles around each pile where it stuck out of the water,

and the old pier was bleached white by the sun and salt. U.S.A. was written over everything.

One of my buddies, leaning on the rail next to me, said: "Take a long, last look, Barry."

"That's what I'm doing, Desmond, that's what I'm doing. That old pier is the last thing I'll see in this country for a long time. In fact, it's probably the last thing I'll ever see in this country, period."

## CHAPTER TWO

**A**NOTHER hospital, this time in England. A chap in the next bed introduced himself and asked: “You’re blind, aren’t you, buddy?”

“Blind? No, I’m not blind.” I stopped talking abruptly. For the first time I realized that I *was* blind—in one eye, at any rate. Lying there with both eyes covered with bandages, I must have looked totally blind to the other patients. I could feel the little hairs along my arms stand up. Carefully I explained to the man in the next bed how things really were—that I had been wounded by an explosion and that only my right eye had been taken out. I told him that my left eye would be per-

fect as soon as the hemorrhage cleared up. In telling him, I bolstered my own courage and felt more hopeful.

While I was floating in the little vacuum of security I'd made for myself, the doctor came over to my bed. As he removed the bandages, we went through the usual how-are-you-feeling-today routine and then he said that he was going to put the light on in front of my eyes. My courage plummeted and disappeared. A film of sweat coated my hands. Even before I heard the click, I knew somehow that I wasn't going to be able to see any light. I made a conscious effort to relax, simply to open my eyes and look without straining. There was nothing there but blackness.

The doctor spoke. "Well, soldier?"

After a long minute I shook my head.

The doctor turned to a nurse. "No breakfast for this one in the morning." He started to walk away.

"Wait a minute, doc," I said. "When can I go home?"

“There are plenty on the list before you, soldier. You’ll have to wait your turn.”

He went away and in a blinding second of dread his words to the nurse sunk in. No breakfast meant the operating-room again. “Nurse!” I shouted. “Nurse!”

She was standing right beside me. “What is it, Barry?”

“The doctor. He said no breakfast. That means they’re going to operate again.”

The nurse put her hand on my knee. “No, Barry. Don’t mind him. It’s just his way. All they’re going to do tomorrow is change the cast on your right leg.”

During the next few weeks someone fed me and someone bathed me. My spirits were pretty good, but I didn’t talk much to anyone. My head and my legs ached most of the time. The hospital routine was strange and the sole way I could tell time was when the nurses brought my food.

The one thing that broke the monotony of those

weeks was the daily visits of another doctor, Major Laughton. He came by the bed one day and introduced himself. After we had shaken hands, he said: "Mind if I sit down for a minute?"

I shook my head.

At first he didn't say anything; then: "Well, boy, I wonder if they've plowed the streets in Boston this winter."

I had to laugh. There I lay in a hospital bed thousands of miles from home with my eyes blown out, and a stranger asked me if they'd plowed the streets in Boston.

"Not if they're running true to form, sir. Are you from Boston, too?"

"No, son, I'm not. I visited there once in the dead of winter. I've never been back."

I laughed. "You went there at the wrong time of year," I said. "You ought to see Boston in the spring."

"Spring makes any place a pleasure to be there,"

the major said. "Perhaps you could tell me: what's so fine about Boston in the spring?"

I started to tell him all the things I could remember. There were so many that they filled my head and overflowed from my mouth. I couldn't talk fast enough.

"There's the Public Garden—green grass, yellow jonquils, purple crocuses, white swan boats, blue duck pond. There are children shrieking and running down the paths. There are couples making love under the elm trees. That always makes me laugh. The trees have little bronze plaques on them with the botanical name, or whatever you call it. Very important and Latiny, and underneath the plaque there's a sailor kissing his girl. Old men sleep sitting on the benches. There's always a group of mothers chasing after little boys and girls, yelling at them not to go near the water. Squirrels and pigeons take food right out of your hand. There are more pigeons and squirrels than

there are people. Baby ducks waddle around the little islands in the pond, cheeping and pecking at each other. On the Charles Street side there's usually a few shabby drunks sleeping it off, and on the Arlington Street side the bench-sitters are refugees from the Ritz in mink coats and diamonds.

"Sometimes in May it's warm enough to go to the beach. Not to swim—the water's too cold—just to lie on the smooth sand and soak up sun. The girls next to you have a portable radio, and some boys are always playing ball. Little kids in bright red trunks no bigger than a three-cent stamp are digging holes down by the breakers. You take along tuna-fish sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, bananas and Cokes. Then after lunch you just lie there and think about nothing. The children laugh, the radio plays swing music, and you lie there and think about nothing."

I talked on and on. Before we realized it, a long time had gone by and Major Laughton said he had to go.

After he'd left, I realized that I'd almost forgotten there was anything wrong with me. I felt warm inside, the way you do when you've been with someone you like.

That afternoon a letter came from Donny. When the nurse told me who it was from, my heart began to thump heavily. I heard her fumbling with the envelope and snapped at her to hurry up. I'd written the boys as soon as I could and told them about losing my eye. This would be the first inkling of their reaction. Finally she took out the letter and started to read:

Dear Dad,

School is pretty good. It rained yesterday. We played baseball on Saturday and I got an out. Are you foggy in England? May I have \$5.00? As I want a dog. I'm sorry you have one eye. The \$5.00 will buy a good dog, which I need.

Love,

Donny

P.S. Come home soon. Don't forget the \$5.00.

I'd underestimated them, I guess. The relief was overwhelming.

The next day Major Laughton came back again. I heard his footsteps first and then his voice. "The trouble with the Army," he said, "is that they let women join up." There was a loud crash as he swung the bedside chair around and dropped into it.

"What's the matter, sir?"

"Had an unpleasant tiff with a WAC sergeant who looks like a Notre Dame tackle." He sighed ruefully. "And, darn it, she was right."

I laughed. "Being a sergeant myself, I must admit that's a heart-warming remark."

"Women. Phooey." His voice was heavy with disgust, then it brightened. "Wouldn't life be terrible without 'em, though? Take my wife now—do you have a wife, sergeant?"

"Not now. But I have two of the greatest boys on earth. Say, doc, do you have any children?"

"Children? Barry, I have four of my own and

eleven grandchildren. The oldest is eight and the baby is seven months. Say, before I came over here where there's nothing but a few buzz-bombs, I had a chronic case of maternity jitters. How old are your boys?"

"Seven and nine," I said. "Doc, my sons—what are they going to think of having a man with one eye for a father?"

"Why, son, they won't even know it if you don't tell them. Good grief, boy, your artificial eye will look as much like the real one as two peas in a pod. Didn't anybody bother to tell you?"

"No. No, they didn't, sir. What do you mean? How can they look exactly alike?"

"The colors are matched. A plastic eye rotates, reflects, stares—it's identical in every respect with your real eye as far as the world's concerned. Barry, I wouldn't waste five minutes worrying over how it'll look. Take it from me, it looks like the real McCoy."

I smiled toward the major. "Thanks, doc."

Major Laughton reached out and thumped my shoulder. "Well, boy, I'm off to my private war with the WAC. See you tomorrow."

When he'd gone, I wanted to laugh out loud. Nothing seemed so tough any more.

One morning I was lying there doing nothing, as usual, when I happened to touch my left eye. It didn't feel exactly right, so I explored further with my fingers. I put both hands up to my eye sockets and tried to compare their size. Pushing a little against the bandages, I measured frantically with my fingertips. There was no question about it. The eye was smaller than it should have been. I jerked my head from side to side, hoping I could find someone to help me. The doctor and the nurse must have known my eye, my one good eye, was shrinking.

I broke down completely and started to cry. My thoughts were in a crazy jumble. I'd get out of this hospital if I had to crawl on my belly. With a tre-

mendous heave, I rose into a sitting position and grabbed the wires that held my leg in traction.

A hand forced me back on the bed, and the nurse, who must have been standing there for some time, said quietly: "What's the matter, Barry? Something gone wrong? Are the legs hurting you?"

"Get out!" I shouted. "Get away from my bed. You've known all along what was happening, you and that quack doctor. Get out!"

I heard the nurse run off, and almost at once the doctor arrived.

"What's all this fuss, Barry? Why are you stirring up such a commotion?"

"I'll tell you what the fuss is about!" I yelled. "My good eye has been shrinking up. Who do you armchair warriors think you are? While the rest of us guys do your fighting, you don't even have enough brains to—"

My speech, luckily, was interrupted by Major Laughton. He called the doctor to one side and

spoke in a low voice. The doctor left and Major Laughton came over to my bed.

“Barry,” he said, “you were about to talk yourself into trouble. You’re all snafued over something that most likely isn’t worth it. What brought this on, anyway?”

“For Pete’s sake, major, I just felt my left eye and it’s all shrunk up. You must have known what was happening, but you didn’t tell me about it. Why have they kept me here when my only good eye could have been saved in America?”

“Listen to me. Don’t you suppose we’ve done all we could for you? We’re not butchers, sergeant, we’re competent surgeons and physicians, and we’ve had cases a lot worse then yours.” His voice softened. “I’ve watched you and worried about you like one of my own, boy. Tomorrow we’re taking your leg out of traction. If everything is O.K., you’ll be on the next plane for Scotland. And from there you’ll be flown to the States.” He started to

walk away, then added: "I'll square things with the colonel."

I forgot the colonel. I forgot all my pain and fright. At last I was going to America.

### CHAPTER THREE

**F**ROM Scotland a C-54 carried me and nineteen other litter patients on the short hop to Iceland, where, for the first time in many months, we tasted fresh milk and potatoes. The next jump took us to Newfoundland. The nearer the plane came to the States and to the best surgeons in the world, the better I felt.

Soon the stewardess announced that we were about to land at Mitchel Field. The big plane settled down on the runway. I was home.

The relief, the excitement—something—had exhausted me. I fell asleep as soon as I was put to bed in the New Cantonment Hospital.

When I woke up, I could feel that someone stood next to me. "Who's there?" I asked.

My brother Bill answered. "It's Bill and Josie, Henry," he said quietly. "The nurse says we can only stay a few minutes."

I didn't know what to say.

Josie cried a little bit, then Bill and I talked inconsequentially. I explained again about my left eye's healing and told them of the plastic eye that would be put in the right socket. I told them that I was comfortable except for my legs, and would soon be as normal as anyone. Bill asked me about the hospital in England.

"I didn't like it there, Bill. At night, when the lights were out, the fog seeped into the ward and set bones to aching. Everyone in the ward was a surgical case. Most of them were in traction and the English fog bit right into the bones. Someone was always moaning and the docs were busy all night with hypos trying to ease the pain."

Josie, listening, had stopped sobbing. I told them

about Major Laughton, and by the time I'd finished, Josie had pulled herself together enough to tell me about Donny and Junior.

"I haven't seen them since you were—hurt, Henry, but we've written. They've taken your wound in stride, Henry, just like they do everything else."

Bill asked me if there was anything they could do for me.

I shook my head. "No, thanks, Bill. When my eye and legs are healed, I'm coming home and go to work. There's nothing to do now but wait."

After they'd gone, I lay and listened to the noises of the ward. Close by, a nurse rattled something on the bedside table. When she saw that I no longer had visitors, she told me it was time for my shave and suggested that I turn the radio on. I fumbled around for the switch and twisted it. Pretty soon I was laughing at Arthur Godfrey and being shaved at the same time. Everything sounded different here. Arthur Godfrey was fun-

nier; the voices were louder, more cheerful; the footsteps were lighter and quicker. Even the air was different. It smelled warmer, more friendly. I felt like laughing just for the fun of it.

A few hours later, I boarded a C-47 bound for Philadelphia. I was headed for the Valley Forge Hospital in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, where all eye cases wound up sooner or later. By sundown, we'd arrived.

The next morning a nurse and a doctor came to my bedside. The nurse spoke first. "Dr. Lishon, this is Henry Barry."

I stuck out my hand and the doctor took it in his own.

"Well, doc," I said, "how does my eye look to you?"

This time when I heard the old familiar sound of a flashlight clicking on, I knew I shouldn't see anything. A moment later it clicked off again.

"What did the doctors tell you before you came home?" Dr. Lishon asked.

“They took out my right eye in Paris and told me that the hemorrhage behind my left eye would be a long time clearing up.”

The doctor didn’t speak for a few minutes and the little chill that prickled my spine was no stranger to me. I told myself not to be a darn fool.

Then the doctor said unsteadily: “Barry, I know your war record. Your kind of courage is equal to what I have to tell you. The chances of your ever seeing again are absolutely hopeless. You’re totally blind in both eyes.”

I heard the words, but at first I didn’t understand them. The doctor might have been talking about someone else. I felt cold and heavy, but nothing had registered yet. Then I got mad.

“You’re lying to me,” I said loudly. I swung out my arm and grabbed the doctor’s jacket, pulling him down toward me. “You’re lying,” I said again, louder.

The doctor took hold of my wrists. Very softly he said: “I’m sorry, Barry.”

The inadequacy of his words, sincere as they were, gave me an insane desire to laugh.

He went on talking. "You're upset now. I'm going to order a sedative for you. Tomorrow we can—"

I yielded, catching at the straw. Tomorrow. Tomorrow it would be all right, this would pass.

The doctor left quickly and I lay there thinking of what he'd said. "Hopeless" was the word he'd used—hopeless, totally blind. I tried desperately to keep from panicking, but the doctor hadn't left so much as a loophole. Why hadn't I been prepared for this possibility? Why had I been told that I was only blind in one eye? I was blind, blind, blind.

Terror started at the edge of my mind and spread like a stain across it. I wanted to run away, not from any place or any person, but from this formless, fluid blot of fear. I was imprisoned within myself. No outside force could comfort me or erase the enveloping terror. A few desultory tears fell from my blind left eye; they hurt as if they were

blood. By the time the tears had dried, the fear had begun to recede a little. I went into a stupor of almost unbearable agony, cold as marble and empty of thought.

Later I started to remember; the terror hovering now at the outer edges of my mind was ready to come back the moment I gave in to it. I remembered that fellow in my home town who tapped his way along with a white cane. Everybody knew him. People stared and the children followed him. I had helped him across the street one day, scared to death that he'd trip on something and that I'd get the blame. I hadn't known what to say to him and was relieved when we reached the other side of the street because I'd felt so helpless. I remembered wondering if the fellow was as tragic as he looked, tapping his lonely way along the sidewalk. Now I was to be blind, forever. I'd be like that blind man with the kids grinning and people shaking their heads.

In Germany, one night, I had been looking for a

fox-hole that had been abandoned by someone in the outfit who had gone to the rear. When I had found it, I ducked inside to see what it was like. Lying in the fox-hole was the body of a dead G.I. He had been a thin-faced kid of about twenty. There was a jagged hole in his head. His glasses and K-rations lay near by. The sight of him had sickened me. I thought of that kid when the doctor had gone. I wondered who was better off, the dead G.I. or myself.

I hated the doctor, I hated the nurses, I hated all the wounded men around me in the ward.

I swore to myself that I'd never go home where people could point at me and whisper: "There goes that Barry fellow. You know, he's the poor man who lost his eyesight in the war." I'd go somewhere far away—maybe the west coast, where nobody knew me. The government would have to give me some kind of disability compensation and I could live on that. Pretty soon the people I'd be forced to come in contact with would learn to leave me

alone. I promised myself that just before I was discharged I'd write to my family and a few friends and tell them that I was going away. From here on out, all I wanted was to be left alone.

A tray of food was placed on my bed. Footsteps passed back and forth. There were voices. Then a long, long silence. Confused and exhausted, I dozed off.

I had a dream. I was back home. Great crowds watched me as I walked down the street. In front of my eyes there was a heavy mist. But though nobody knew it, I could see through the mist. I could see the people, the cars, even the trees and the flowers. I walked along swinging my arms and taking great strides. I watched the people watching me. They murmured in awe. They whispered to one another and pointed. Some of them even shrank back as I passed. They marveled at my confidence. "He is blind," they said, "yet look at his poise." In the dream I said, very pleased with myself: "If this is blindness, so what?"

Two orientation girls, attached to Ward One, woke me up later in the morning. One of them asked me to roll over onto a wheel litter for the ride to Ward One, the ward for the legally blind.

I had noticed a sill at the entrance to each ward. There is a queer bumping noise when you are rolled over it. As the girls rolled me down the corridors and up and down the ramps I waited for that last bump. The closer it came, the more I sweated. Every time we rounded a turn or crossed a ramp, I thought the last bump would be there. I waited and waited and waited for it, knowing the bump would be for me the beginning of one road and the end of another. All I could do was lie and wait.

We reached the bump. The front wheels thudded softly over it. Another second and the back wheels rolled over. The ride was finished. On my chart went the words: "Legally blind."

Back in bed, I turned on my side away from the rest of the patients. I didn't feel like talking to any-

one. Dinner came and went. All afternoon I didn't move.

The ward was serene and quiet. I had expected confusion certainly—patients milling, stumbling, cursing. Except for a few people talking in low tones, there was no evidence of anyone's even being there. I didn't know then, of course, that there was such a term as "legally blind" or that many of the patients in the blind wards of this hospital had various degrees of eyesight. Some of them had light perception; some of them could see obstructions like beds or wheelchairs. Still others possessed fair eyesight in one eye, but little or none in the other.

When the girls on the ward kidded with me, all I could think to say was: "What do you know about it?"

I received three Purple Hearts during the war. The first was for a shrapnel wound in my stomach; the second for a shrapnel wound in right leg; the third for my blindness. During my first afternoon

in Ward One a couple of the nurses kidded with me to make me feel better. I hated them for it. I felt that I had a right to be surly. It reminded me of what our colonel had said just before I had won my second Purple Heart. Lieutenant General Hermann Ramcke, the German officer in charge at the defense of Brest, had been found in a cottage on the peninsular of Crozon. As we neared the cottage, the colonel of the regiment had walked up to the building. General Ramcke had come out of the cottage in full-dress uniform, leading a German dachshund. He was wearing a monocle. The general had asked the colonel by what authority the colonel was demanding his surrender. Our colonel pointed toward his men and replied: "There is my authority. It's all I need."

When the girls joked with me, I wanted to point to my empty eye sockets and say: "There is my authority to act the way I please. It's all I need."

When the nurse brought supper and I refused it,

she threatened to call the doctor if I didn't at least drink a glass of milk. I drank it finally to get rid of her.

I didn't sleep much that night. I tried not to think of home, but I couldn't help it. I thought of my sons having to tell people that their father was blind. Then I remembered that I wasn't going to tell them at all. I thought of the things I used to do and the many things I still wanted to do. I wanted a home for the boys, one with a new wife in it and a gang of neighborhood kids in the back yard. I wanted a new car and a good job and a cottage at the beach. I wanted to be able to go to the ball games again. I used to go out to the ball park every time the Braves were in town. I always left the streetcar at Babcock Street and then walked way round to the bleachers. I liked to be there early and watch the pitchers warming up in the bull-pen. I'd eat peanuts and drink beer and holler at the players. Sometimes, on a weekend, my boys would go with me. We'd go in the afternoon

and be burned to a bright red on one side because the bleachers faced south. I remembered, too, the fun I always had going swimming. I loved the crowds, the color, the exhilaration of diving into a cold ocean. I had enjoyed going to the movies, reading the newspaper in the morning over a cup of coffee, standing at the corner of Tremont and Boylston Streets, watching the pretty girls walk by. Now I couldn't do those things any more. I had no eyes. I cursed a little and prayed a little, but most of the time I simply lay fighting the terror.

Next morning the nurse brought a tray of food and placed it on my bed. I hated to admit it, even to myself, but I discovered that I was hungry. I could hardly wait to eat.

"My name's Betty," the nurse said. "I understand they've been feeding you right along. Well, lesson number one in this ward is the food problem. I'll explain it to you. For example, you have home-fried potatoes from twelve to three, scram-

bled eggs from three to nine, and apricots from nine to twelve.”

“What are you talking about? Who ever heard of anyone eating eggs from three to nine? What is this, a psycho ward?”

Although Betty had probably heard the same thing a thousand times, she laughed anyway. She completely ignored my rudeness. “I can see that nobody has explained it to you. It’s called the clock system. Just think of your dish as a clock. The farthest edge of the plate from you is twelve o’clock. Now, when I tell you that your home fries are from twelve to three, it makes sense. You know where to reach for them. Right?”

“Right,” I agreed. “But I’m glad you explained; you had me worried for a minute. Now I see—” That stopped me, but I managed a grin. “I get what you mean now. I wasn’t quite sure whom to worry about, me or you.”

After breakfast I had to admit that this clock system was a good idea. “Now I won’t have to be

fed like a baby. No more food running down my chin. And I can still find my mouth all right. Seems to be in the same place it was before I was hit.”

After I’d eaten, I slept until noon. When I woke up, footsteps hurrying up and down the corridor told me that the dinner trays were being brought in; and what’s more, I was hungry again.

While I slept, something seemed to have happened. My feeling of utter despair and frustration had almost left me. I even stretched lazily and sniffed with anticipation at the smell of food in the air. To this day I don’t know what caused the change in me that morning, but I do know that it marked the beginning of my acceptance of being blind.

Soon one of the detachment men came over, raised my bed until I was almost in a sitting position, and then put the tray of food in front of me. “There you are, bud,” he said. Potatoes from twelve to three, roast beef from three to nine, and string beans from nine to twelve.”

He hurried away.

“Here we go again,” I thought, “only this time I’m on my own.”

I reached to the left of the plate for a piece of bread. The first thing I touched was a small dish. Instead of the bread, I stuck my hand into something soft and gooey. “Darn,” I muttered, and fumbled cautiously until I found the napkin. I cleaned my hand slowly. Feeling deflated, I figured the bread must be on the other side of the tray. This time I held my hand a little higher, planning to drop down on the bread and take it by surprise. Wrong again. I had held my hand just high enough to knock over a large glass of milk, which whacked against the elusive bread dish and broke. Half the milk spilled on the meat and vegetables and the other half rolled off the tray into my lap. I lay on the bed shaking with anger and frustration.

Just as I was ready to throw the whole tray out the window, if I could find the window, the nurse who had taught me the clock system dashed over.

“What’s the matter, Barry? Why aren’t you eating?” Then catching sight of the mess, she said: “Oh, I see you had a little accident. Don’t let it bother you, sergeant, it happens to the best of us. I’ll get you another tray and change the bedding in a jiffy.”

“Go ahead, change the bed. But as far as the food goes, forget it. I’ve lost my appetite. And I’ve made up my mind about something.”

“What’s that?”

“All I’m ever going to eat for the rest of my life is sandwiches. That’s for sure.”

After she’d changed the bed, I lay there for a while, still mad at myself; then I decided that maybe a cigarette would help. I found a package on the table and searched around until I’d located matches. When I struck one, the whole pack flared up, burning my thumb and two fingers. I threw the folder of matches on the floor and swore like crazy. Who would want anyone like me around, going through life making one break after another?

“Something’d better turn up soon,” I thought, “or I’ll be ready for the nut house.”

A radio—that was something I wanted. Before, when things went wrong, I’d always been able to forget by tuning in some diverting program. The next chance there was, I’d ask for a radio.

Feeling mad and sorry for myself, I heard footsteps and a woman’s voice saying: “Welcome to Ward One, Barry. I’m a gray lady, Mrs. Cohen. Would you like me to write some letters for you?”

“No, thanks,” I said. “Maybe some other time.”

“Very well,” she said; “but if you should change your mind, just call out. I’ll be around the ward all afternoon.”

I didn’t bother to answer and she went away.

More footsteps: visiting hour. I lit a cigarette and in spite of myself started thinking about home. I guess it was because of the men’s families coming into the ward and the woman’s offering to write letters for me. I was turning restlessly, not wanting to think about it, when I heard a man and a woman

talking close by. He kept calling her Suze, but I don't think she mentioned his name once and I never found out who he was. The first thing I heard her say was: "No, I won't do it." It was the defiant emphasis of her words that first caught my attention.

The man answered her in a flat monotone, as if he'd said the same thing so often that it was empty of meaning: "Go away, Suze. Don't come back."

She mimicked him scathingly. " 'Go away, Suze. Don't come back.' Well, I won't, and that's that. You're going to get well and get out of that bed and come home. What am I supposed to do? Hide the kids, get a divorce, run away, just because you're blind? You're still you. We'd love you no matter what."

"No, you wouldn't, Suze." He sounded tired. "You love what I was, not what I am. Go away now. If you don't divorce me, I'll divorce you."

She laughed. "From that bed? No you won't. You can't. And by the time you're getting about

by yourself, you won't want a divorce. That's the chance I'm taking."

"You're a fool, Suze."

"Sure. And you're the husband of a fool, you darling dope."

I eavesdropped quite frankly, but after the girl, Suze, had gone, I began to toss restlessly again. Another woman's voice broke in: "I'm Mrs. Roberts. I visit this ward two or three times a week, but this is the first time I've seen you. You must be new here; am I right?"

I opened my mouth to answer her, but before I could get out a reply, she went on: "Where are you from? Are you from around here, or are you a long way from home? The other boys in this ward come from all over the country. Really, I just don't know what I'd do without them. Coming here to talk with them and visit with them has been a great inspiration to me. I love to visit the boys in this ward. They're all wonderful. I don't live too far away, so it's really no bother at all for me.

Sometimes my niece comes along, too, but she had some shopping to do today. I'll have you meet her next time. Would you like a piece of chocolate cake or a banana? Maybe both?"

"No, thanks, I don't care for anything. As a matter of fact, I'm trying to go to sleep. I hope you don't mind."

"I'm so sorry. Maybe you'll feel better after a good nap. But don't you worry. I'll be back in a few days, and next time I'll bring my niece, Emma, with me. You'll like her. She's heaps of fun."

"Oh, sure, sure," I mumbled.

"Sleep tight."

She went away.

The compassion and honesty in Mrs. Roberts's voice were obvious, but I thought of her with derision. I hadn't learned yet to draw pleasure from others or even to look for it within myself. I was tormented and lonely.

Sleep tight, blind man, and pleasant dreams.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**A**T BREAKFAST next morning, there were two hard-boiled eggs on my plate. Talk about booby traps! I was figuring the best plan of attack when Betty came over. “Hi,” she said. “How’s everything going?”

“It’s too early to tell yet,” I said. “Are those eggs obstacle number one for the day?”

“Relax, Barry. In a few days you’ll be thoroughly familiar with the ways of this ward. I know how you feel, but you mustn’t let the little things get you down. It’s like basic training, in a way. All very confusing at first, especially to the men who’ve completely lost their eyesight.”

“Do me a favor,” I said.

“What’s on your mind?”

“Tell me all about this ward. Who’s here and how many of them can see things? How’s the place laid out?”

“Well,” she said, “when you enter the ward, there are two private rooms on each side of the corridor. Next comes the office—that’s on the left—and the men’s washroom on the right. Then there are six cubicles, three on each side, with four beds in each one. They’re sort of out in the open; that is, they have no doors. About half the fellows in this ward have vision of some sort, but some of the ones you can hear walking around have no sight whatever. Of course, they’ve been here for quite a while. They get around by themselves without much trouble. They even go to the mess hall alone.”

“The mess hall’s pretty near here, huh?”

“On the contrary,” Betty said, “it’s on the floor below and it’s in another wing. It’s a good five-

minute walk from here and means going down a long ramp and taking several right and left turns.”

“What are those guys, veterans of World War I?”

She laughed. “Hardly. You’ll be surprised at how fast you’ll be getting around this hospital. As soon as your legs are strong enough, you’ll even be going downtown by yourself.”

“Sister, they’ve got guts. I wonder if I’ll ever be able to get around like that.” I paused. “Uh—do they all use canes?”

“Usually not, around here. Downtown they sometimes do.”

“Where are you from, Betty? You don’t talk like an Easterner.”

“Ah reckon not, pardner. Ah hails from Dead Man’s Gulch, Wyomin’.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Cross my heart. I was born on a ranch there and lived there all my life—almost.”

“How in the world did you wind up in this place?”

“Chasing rainbows, sarge,” she answered. “Or, to be more accurate, chasing a man.”

“Did you catch him?”

She was slow in answering. “Yes, I caught up with him. But it was too late. My faithless cowpoke had married somebody else.” She spoke even slower. “He’s dead now—at Anzio.”

“Gosh, Betty, I’m sorry.”

“Bygones, sarge.” She got up and began to fuss with my pillow.

When Betty left, I lay back on the bed again. The poor kid had always been cheerful with all the patients, but inside she must have been crying hard.

After a while a different doctor came. He examined my legs and then looked at my eye.

“I might as well tell you, sergeant,” he said, “you’re gradually losing the vitreous, the fluid,

from your eye. Eventually a plastic one will have to be fitted over it."

"There isn't anything I can do about it, is there?"

"Nothing. Tell me, sergeant, is there anything special on your mind? Maybe I can help."

"Can you help me get a radio?"

"They're pretty scarce, but I'll keep it in mind. I know of three or four patients who've been on the lookout for one for some time now."

I explained carefully that I didn't want the radio for nothing; I had enough money and I wanted to buy one. When he was gone, I kept thinking about that. I was never going to take anything from anybody for nothing. I didn't know how big my disability compensation was going to be, but I hoped it would be enough to give me independence. "A job," I thought. "Will I ever be able to work again? Who would hire a man who couldn't see?"

Somewhere I'd heard about places called retreats or Lighthouses—I wasn't too sure of the

name—where the blind make brooms and mop handles. I had visions of myself hunched over a table with rows and rows of blind men stretching out on all sides of me. Men who could see walked about giving orders, talking about us in the third person. Piles of brooms and mop handles were on the floor behind us, and sometimes a woman would buy one out of pity. But mostly it was just one door after another slammed in my face. I was very sure that I didn't want any part of it.

I lit a cigarette. After a couple of drags I reached for the ashtray. Instead of the ashtray, I stuck the cigarette and the two fingers holding it into a full glass of water. The cigarette fizzled. I left it floating there. It's a wonder that I didn't drink it down later on. For a minute I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Then I turned just plain mad again. Every time I seemed to be getting a little confidence, some stupid accident took it away from me. I felt even worse than when the doc had

told me I'd have to be fitted for a plastic eye. What if I made a mistake like that in somebody's house?

The next day went fairly well. I managed all three meals without any trouble, which was a victory in itself; but when I reached for the matches after supper, I had another accident. I knocked over a full glass of water, which rolled off the table and smashed. As I lay there in everlasting darkness, the incident blew itself up out of all proportion. I punched the pillow and cursed everything in the place.

Twice in my life I had seen a man break down. The first time had been Germany, when our unit was in Duren. The German artillery fire was heavy. We had been awaiting orders to attack. The soldiers were hurriedly writing letters home when they weren't checking their guns, ammunition, and gear. Everybody had been keyed up. By midnight the conversation slowed down. Most of the men were sitting on the ground smoking. Suddenly a young corporal who was sitting near me had

jumped to his feet and started screaming. He screamed and sobbed until the medics came and stuck a needle in his arm. The next day he was sent back to a hospital.

The second time I had seen a man go to pieces was just the night before. A patient in a bed down the ward from me had started screaming in the middle of the night. He had kept it up until the doctor had come with a hypodermic.

I wondered if this could happen to me. I felt utterly helpless again and afraid. During those days I worried as much about what might happen as about the things that actually occurred. To add to my troubles, I heard Mrs. Roberts's voice from the bed across the ward. "Oh, no," I groaned. "Gabby's back and she's brought her niece. I'm in for it now." I thought of pretending to sleep, but felt rather ashamed of the idea. The voices stopped and I heard Mrs. Roberts and Emma crossing the floor.

"Emma," Mrs. Roberts said, "here's the young

man I was telling you about. The other day he practically told me to run along because he was sleepy. But here I am, back again. He doesn't know what a persistent old woman I am, does he?"

"Don't let her frighten you, Barry," the niece said. Her voice was quiet and slow. She sounded pretty. "My aunt is really quite harmless. There's only one fly in the ointment. She'll never let up on you until you eat some of her chocolate cake."

I grinned in spite of myself. "That's a deal. And I'll eat the banana, too. After visiting hours they give us milk and a sandwich. Tonight I'll eat your cake instead."

We talked for quite a while. At first I found myself wondering what they looked like; then I made up pictures of them in my mind and was content not to know. I had Emma a blonde, the soft kind, with dark eyes and a round, youthful figure. Mrs. Roberts was shorter than Emma. She had gray hair, wore glasses, and looked something like the grandmother who advertises cake flour. I still don't

know what they really looked like, but whenever I think of them, I see them in my mind's eye just as I imagined them then.

They were pleasant people and gave me the answers to a lot of questions I'd been wondering about. Mrs. Roberts told me that the veterans who had been there for any length of time were very fussy about their clothes. On the street, she said, they were always well dressed. They insisted on paying their own way unless they were at a party given expressly for them. So far, all the vets that Mrs. Roberts and Emma had met seemed to accept their blindness with courage and even a sense of humor.

Emma told me the story of one vet—she called him Sam—who spent his spare time practicing amateur psychiatry on the other patients. He would sit by their beds murmuring philosophically, dishing up platitudes, and discussing libidos or manic depression with equal aplomb. Actually, he knew nothing about such matters, but with a smattering

of technical terms and a natural aptitude for out-talking the other fellow he could sound very learned and convincing. The other patients enjoyed him hugely and the result was that he did more for morale than a dozen licensed psychiatrists would have done. In one instance Sam was the direct cause of reuniting a husband and wife. The husband, a blind veteran, had written his wife about his wound. When she came rushing to be with him, the man refused point-blank to let her near him. In desperation the wife appealed to the doctors and to a hospital psychiatrist, who tried in vain to reunite the couple. Finally, and inevitably, Sam took up the psychological cudgels, and by the time he had completed his amateur treatment, not only were the husband and wife in each other's arms, but they admitted that they were happier than they had ever been before the war.

I asked if most of the G.I.'s who went downtown were accompanied by people who could see, particularly their wives.

“Not necessarily,” Mrs. Roberts explained. “We see a lot of the boys by themselves. Some of the vets’ wives have even rented rooms in town, and some have taken jobs until their husbands are ready to leave. There is a group of those couples, if that’s what you mean.”

“That’s not all,” said Emma. “Nowadays we see newly blinded vets with wives they themselves never knew until they arrived here.”

“Are you kidding? You mean some of these men who lost their eyesight overseas came here and married girls they’d never known?”

“Certainly.”

“That’s—something to think about, isn’t it?”

We chatted for a few minutes longer; then they had to go. Mrs. Roberts asked me if there was anything special that I wanted next time she came. I grinned and said: “More chocolate cake.” Then I thought of a radio. I told her that I wanted to buy one, not have it given me. “Are they really so hard to get?” I asked.

“New ones are almost impossible to get hold of. Maybe we could get you a second-hand one. I’ll call a friend of mine in Philadelphia when I get home tonight.”

“As long as it runs, I don’t care if it’s in pieces. I guess how it looks isn’t important anyway.”

In the little silence that followed I could have bitten off my tongue. My last remark put a damper on our pleasant conversation, but we shook hands all around, and after Mrs. Roberts reminded me again to eat her chocolate cake, they went away.

After they’d gone, I thought about what they had told me. I couldn’t think of one single reason why mothers and wives would love a man less just because he couldn’t see. I thought of how I must look and decided that I needn’t worry for a while about imminent proposals.

That evening I made my first acquaintance in the ward, the vet in the bed next to mine, whose name was Stan. He was a colored boy from down south somewhere, who had lost his left eye and his

right leg below the knee. With the other eye he could see perfectly. Stan was the kind of person who could make you forget your troubles. He had a deep, hearty laugh and told stories that invariably made him laugh harder than his listeners. Neither of us had had any visitors since I'd been there.

By one thirty the following afternoon I had managed to eat two meals without getting my hands and feet mixed up in the food and felt very smug about it. During visiting hours Stan and I passed the time telling jokes. Stan told a few first, then we lapsed into silence. Suddenly I remembered a good joke of my own, so without wasting any time I plunged into it. It was a long story, one of the kind in which you find yourself waving your arms and legs to help out. I even laughed aloud once or twice myself. Right in the middle of my joke I realized that the nearest cubicles had become completely quiet and that I hadn't heard a sound out of Stan since I started. I reached over wildly and touched

Stan's bed. There was no one in it. No wonder the ward had become so quiet. I heard the already familiar clucking sound of sympathy from across the room and winced. My face reddened and my ears burned. The silence was maddening.

"Why didn't he tell me he was leaving? Why in heck doesn't somebody say something?"

For lack of anything better to do, I turned on my side and lit a cigarette. My hands shook. "Man," I thought, "if things keep up this way, I'll be the meanest man in Massachusetts." I had forgotten for a minute that I'd planned not to go home. Halfheartedly I changed the last two words. I began to wonder if any of my old friends were still around home. Maybe I should call up my family. Then I decided to put it off until later. I had to wait for the time when I realized that their worry and fear were as great as my own. They didn't even know what had happened to me. The War Department would have notified them that I was wounded, but not of the extent or nature of the

wound. They wouldn't know where I was or how I was. Soon, perhaps, their despondency would overbalance mine. Then I could call. At any rate, I faced the idea without any perceptible qualms.

As soon as visiting hours were over, Betty came to my bed. "They tell me you've been talking to yourself, sarge," she said. "Why pull that stuff? They aren't going to send you back overseas." She rumbled my hair as she talked.

I could sense that the other patients were listening. "I'll never live that one down. If I get transferred to the cracker ward, it'll be all Stan's fault." I went on to tell her what had happened.

Everybody roared and Stan laughed until he cried. I felt relieved. Looking back on it, it was funny, and now that the other patients knew, they could explain to their visitors.

"Hey, Barry," called one of the men, "my mother thinks they should put you in another ward. She says they never can tell when you might become violent."

“I hope you fellows will explain it to your folks when they come back,” I said anxiously.

“Don’t worry, Barry,” another patient said. “The first month is awful, but after that it gets worse.”

Another man called over: “Where are you from, Barry?”

“Massachusetts,” I said, “the best state in the Union.”

Everyone yelled.

“What’s wrong with California?” asked another voice.

“The only trouble with California,” said one G.I., “is that it’s not in Georgia.”

“New England, huh?” said the fellow who had first called out to me. “I figured that’s where you were from. Nobody could miss that down-east twang.”

I could tell by the sound of his voice that he was coming toward my bed.

“Which bed are you in?” he asked.

“I’m over in the corner, by the window.”

“Which window?”

“Is there more than one? All I know about this one is that the sun is hitting me on the left.”

When he finally found me, my new buddy introduced himself. “I’m John Foley, from upper New York State.”

“Hi. What are *you* in for?”

“Lost my right eye and three fingers from my right hand. Normandy. Where’d you get yours?”

“Germany. A shell.”

“Tough. But nothing’s as tough as it seems. Besides, the service here is better than at the Waldorf, and with our girl Betty, what more could a man want?”

We talked for over an hour.

That night, after chow, Foley came over to my bed again. While we were talking, the G.I. in the next cubicle was singing at the top of his lungs and obviously was dressing to go out.

“He seems pretty cheerful about something,” I said. “I suppose he’s got a date.”

There was a popular song at the time called “How Many Hearts have You Broken with Those Great Big Beautiful Eyes?” All of a sudden the man started crooning at the top of his lungs: “How many hearts have I broken with these great big plastic eyes?” Some of the other patients laughed, but I felt ill. “What’s the matter with him?” I said.

Foley was unperturbed. “You mean Joey? He’s just one of those happy-go-lucky guys. I guess he feels pretty good about his date for tonight.”

“Is he blind? Does he know what it’s like to have plastic eyes?”

“Yeah, he knows. He took quite a beating over there. Been here a long time.”

“Maybe. But how can he joke about a thing like plastic eyes? I don’t see anything funny about them.”

“Well,” Foley said slowly, “I hear that he was pretty well down in the dumps for the first few months he was here. You know, Barry, a guy could

swear and cry over something for years, but when all's said and done, he'd still be blind, wouldn't he?"

For a couple of seconds I didn't answer; then I said: "Well, yes, there's no getting around that one."

"When a guy keeps banging his head against a stone wall and winds up with nothing to show for it but a headache, if he's got any sense at all he'll quit. The next step is to look for another way of escape, and then another, until finally you catch on that the kind of escape you're looking for doesn't exist. Your new life is forever, and nobody's going to take it away from you. Then, friend, you find your escape. It's been there all along. In other words, you can't get *through* the wall, so why not learn to live on this side of it? Everything's like that, but people never seem to catch on. They keep batting their heads against the wall. Listen, you can't live without trouble, so why not learn to face it? Make the side of the wall you're on the en-

viable side. Make it the best side. That's what Joey's doing. He's accepted his blindness and has learned to live with it. He gets a kick out of life because he knows that he can still do everything he could before, except see. And he's learned to live without seeing."

While Foley was talking, Joey had gone. The ward was quiet. I said: "Maybe you're right, Foley."

"I know I'm right. You'll find out sometime that everything I've told you is true. Time, Barry, time and a little patience will take care of everything." He yawned noisily. "I think I'll hit the sack. See you in the morning."

"Yeah, Foley, see you in the morning."

I had a tough time getting to sleep that night. Phrases like "see you in the morning" and "see you later" and "see you around" were all mixed up with things like "your new life is forever" and "make your side of the wall the best side."

## CHAPTER FIVE

**I**T WAS quiet in the ward the following weekend. Most of the patients were away on passes and there wasn't much to do. As I lay there daydreaming, heavy footsteps stopped by my bed. I could hear bumping and thumping noises, but whoever was making them didn't say anything. He grunted as he leaned over, and then straightened up. For a minute he stood breathing loudly; then he boomed out: "Well, aren't you going to try it?"

"Try what?" I was exasperated. "What's going on?"

"The radio, you dope. They tell me you've been screeching your head off for a radio. I'm Com-

mander Brown from Philadelphia. Mrs. Roberts called me about you. Said you didn't have a radio, so I got busy and dug one up. Darn near had to dig it up, at that." He sounded a little rueful. "It's a seven-tube Philco. Not new, but it's just had an overhaul. Go on, try it."

I noticed that he wasted no time explaining where the radio had been placed, what it looked like, or how to locate the dial, and I was grateful. "A radio? Commander, I've been praying for one." It might have been that someone had offered me the sun. I couldn't say the right words, just "Thanks, commander." I added brusquely: "How much do I owe you?"

"Not a thin dime, sergeant. That's your radio, to keep for as long as you're around. In fact, you can take it with you when you go home if you want to. If you don't want to take it with you, give it to somebody here who doesn't have one."

I found the dial and turned on my new radio. In a few seconds music came pouring out. It

seemed like a miracle. I stuck out my hand and Commander Brown took it in his own. "I'm new here," I said, "and I can't walk, either. This radio means an awful lot to me. I don't know how to tell you."

"Forget it. I'm glad I'm lucky enough to have got it for you." His voice sounded sheepish and rather proud. "You know, soldier, I spent a little time in the hospital in the last war. It was—oh, well, you know what it's like." He cleared his throat and started in again. "Here's a cigarette-lighter, too. It isn't fancy, but it works. It's already filled, but here's some lighter fluid to go with it." He gave my hand another shake. "I've got to go along. Take it easy, Barry. I'll drop in again, and when you're on your feet we'll have you up to Philly on a party. See you later."

I said good-by to him and lay listening to the radio. Every now and then they'd play a song that reminded me of a girl I'd known or a place I'd been. It started a whole series of memories—home

and dates, spots I'd visited as a kid, the family. I wallowed in them all, pretending things were the way they used to be. For a little while I even forgot I couldn't see. The ward, the patients, the hospital, even the war faded right out of mind. I thought of a little beer joint in Brooklyn. They'd had a juke box and a bar and about ten square feet to dance in. A bunch of us used to meet there, sometimes with girls, sometimes not, to shoot the breeze or to gripe about our jobs or to tell jokes. It had been friendly there, one of those places where you can always find someone you know. I'd had a swell girl then, too. Sally, her name was. She could really dance and she thought I was so wonderful that she made me think so, too. Wonder what she'd think of me now?

I was pondering the question when I heard the voice of the girl called Suze again. I turned my radio down quickly, in time to hear Suze's husband say: "What kind of a job?"

I flopped over on my other side to hear better.

“In a real-estate office,” I heard her answer. “Stenographer. And I found a room in a big old house off the main street in Phoenixville.” Her voice bubbled with enthusiasm. “There are three other patients’ wives boarding there. Your mom said she’d take care of the kids until you came home again, so I’m all set. I can see you every day and spend the weekends at home with the kids.”

Apathetically the man said: “It sounds all right, Suze, but I might be here for a year.”

“Pooh! Who cares? The kids can get along without Mamma for a few days a week. Why, honey, we have the moon! I’ve a job, a place to live, and you.” For the first time she sounded a trifle doubtful. “Don’t you see how perfect it is, honey?”

There was such a long silence that I began to feel apprehensive. Then he said, so quietly that I could barely catch the words: “You’re right, Suzy. It is perfect.” His voice grew stronger. “And listen, Suze, I’ll be out of here so fast your head will spin.”

Suze made one quick gulping sound before she said, laughing: "The only thing you have to worry about now is getting out of here before I get into the bachelor-girl habit."

I listened shamelessly to it all.

Suzy left shortly after that. I turned the radio up, feeling quite happy again that things had worked out as they had for Suze and her blind husband.

During the next two weeks my rehabilitation was accelerated. Every day a nurse wheeled me to the dental clinic, the eye clinic, or the physiotherapy clinic.

My teeth were filled and cleaned, checked and rechecked. At this time, in the eye clinic it was more a matter of watching the healing process. When my brows and lids had been properly treated and the fluid had dried, the plastic eyes were to be fitted. Actually this isn't so drastic as it sounds. Only one eye is fitted; then the other is matched to it. Once the eyes have been put

in, they're in to stay. They can be removed, but if the fitting is satisfactory, there should be no reason ever again to take out the eye. The lid and the socket are stretched until the fit is perfect. I'm told that the results are remarkably lifelike; that as far as physical appearance is concerned, it is extremely difficult to distinguish the natural eye from the artificial one.

Long hours in a prone position made physiotherapy a welcome relief. I developed pride in physical prowess and from day to day could feel the softness of my body change to limber, agile muscles. Twice during those two weeks I was measured for a brace for my right leg, and I had another operation on my eyelids.

I started lacing leather wallets and key rings. It was fun and not too exacting. Braille and typing were two other subjects I took up. I liked typing right away, but Braille was difficult. My fingertips seemed to lack the proper sensitivity to identify the dot combinations. The six little dots gave me

more trouble than the entire alphabet ever did before.

I knew most of the men in the ward by that time. Often one or another of them would be sitting by my bed talking. We talked about everything under the sun, but mostly about our blindness. I learned that to do anything well or even passably when you're blind is a question of practice, practice, practice. Nobody seemed particularly upset because he couldn't see; at least not when he was talking to me. Nights, of course, were bad for all of us. I'd often hear patients scream out in their sleep, and some of the patients became moody. They'd be cheerful one day and down in the dumps the next. And when we were down, we were way down. It was almost impossible to be civil on one of those bad days.

One morning, the brace was ready. I was assigned an orienter, a man named Carl Hamilton. Each patient, as he became able to get around the hospital, had an orienter assigned to him, whose

duty it was to assist the patient until he was able to manage by himself. Sometimes it seemed as if I could get along without him forever, and other times as if I never could. Carl could be a good friend, a slave-driver, a soothing voice, a booster. He was my other self for several weeks, the self that could see. After introducing himself he said: "You and I are going to work together for the next few weeks. When you get used to your brace, it's my job to teach you to get around. After you've managed the hospital, we'll tackle downtown. By that time you'll be anxious to head for home on your first furlough."

I ran my hands over the heavy brace. "Maybe."

"Maybe, nothing. You'll want to go by the time you're ready."

I looked in his direction and said again: "Maybe."

Between the two of us, the brace was fitted to my leg. It was made so that the bottom was embedded in the sole of the shoe. Iron rods extended on

both the inside and the outside of the leg, all the way up to the hip. They ended in a round ring covered with heavy leather. Leather straps, hitched to the inside rod, could be tightened around my leg above and below the knee to relieve the pressure on the foot.

I was afraid to get up, and excited at the same time. Walking in complete darkness would be strange, to say the least. When I had been a kid, I could remember getting dizzy when I walked with my eyes closed.

I slid off the edge of the bed before Carl could hold me. As soon as my feet touched the floor, a sharp pain ran up my right leg. Immediately I grew sick to my stomach, and the room I couldn't see began to spin. I fell over sideways, and Carl grabbed me around the waist.

"Take it easy, Mac," he said. "You've been in bed a long time. You can't just get up and start walking."

I sat down again on the side of the bed and

shook my head to clear it. Then, putting most of the weight on my left foot, I stood up. Carl held my arm. This time nothing happened, so I took a step on my right foot. A terrific pain raced up and down the whole leg. I tried a couple more steps, but it hurt so severely that I had to give up. Carl called the doctor over, and he gave the leg a careful examination. "I guess we were a little too hopeful, Barry," he said. "You'd better stay off that leg for another week or ten days."

What a relief! I didn't want to get up and I didn't want to walk. My bed had become a little world and I was satisfied to stay in it. Things had clicked pretty well lately. I didn't want that what's-the-use feeling to come back again. I moaned and groaned a little to make certain that they knew I was in pain, but inside I felt that the doctor had given me a reprieve.

I let another two weeks go by. Mrs. Cohen, the gray lady, read to me occasionally. I wasn't interested in war stories or any of the heavier stuff. She

stuck strictly to light, gay books—adventure, romance, Westerns. Her voice was gentle, without much emphasis, and acted on me like a sedative.

Carl came every day to nag me into getting up. One day he got fed up with my reluctance. I was talking in a self-pitying vein, thinking he'd feel sorry for me and go away. Instead he almost snapped my head off.

“Why, you lunkhead, what's the matter with you? I've seen cases that would make your hair stand on end and you lie there and moan about how bad off you are. You can still think and learn, can't you? We have boys in here who've lost their minds. You have a home to go to and friends. There are boys here with neither. There's nothing wrong with your brain or your hands or even your legs, when you come right down to it. Think it over, Mac. Tomorrow you're getting off your tail and onto your feet whether *you* like it or not.”

He stamped off.

The next day, after a night of feeling ashamed

and sheepish, I got up. Carl didn't bring up his threat of the day before and neither did I. There wasn't any pain to speak of this time and I had just a touch of dizziness. Carl put a cane in my hand. I felt like a fool with it. Then I shrugged. The other men couldn't see me and most of them used a cane themselves.

"Come on, Barry," Carl urged. "We'll start with the bed. You already know about the table, the radio, the chair, and the window. You haven't been issued any clothes yet, so we'll skip your locker. Let's see. First try walking over to Stan's bed."

I walked over to the edge of the next bed and stopped. My eyes were open as wide as they would go in an effort to see.

"Now," said Carl, "there's a wooden post about a foot and a half in front of you and the same distance on your left. It goes right up to the ceiling. Reach out and touch it."

I put my hands on it, then walked around it. I still strained to see.

“O.K., now turn around and go back to your bed.”

When I stood by my own bed again, Carl said: “Try the whole routine again.”

I walked quickly to Stan’s bed and reached for the post. It wasn’t there. I reached out again and moved my arm back and forth. Still no post. I felt foolish groping around, so I dropped my arm and waited for Carl to say something.

“Don’t look so tragic, Barry. This time when you got to the farthest edge of Stan’s bed, you were turned about two inches more to the left than you were the first time. When you reached for the post, you reached about two inches behind it and then moved your arm back this way looking for it. A couple of inches either way can throw you off. Now push your cane forward about a foot. Feel that rubber mat? Walk over to the other edge of it.”

I did what he asked, then put my cane against the edge of the mat, facing left.

“Keep the cane against the edge and push it in front of you.”

I had walked about twenty feet when Carl stopped me. “Walk across the mat and you’ll come to the door of the men’s washroom. One very important thing, Barry: don’t get into the habit of counting steps. You can’t go through life doing it.”

I crossed to the washroom door, found the handle, and went in. Carl took me around the room three times, showing me where things were located. Above each of the three washbowls was a mirror. I stood in front of one of them with my eyes wide open. I stared hard, thinking that directly before me was my own reflection. Two me’s; the real one and the one in the mirror. I wondered what I looked like now, with blind eyes, scarred, older, a man good for—what?

Carl must have known what I was thinking, because he took hold of my arm. “Let’s go, sarge.” There was no impatience in his voice, only compassion.

I turned to him. "Let me go back by myself, Carl. All right?"

"Sure. I'll stay in back of you."

I stepped out of the washroom, found the mat, and went to the right until I figured I should be near the post. I reached out to my right with the cane and there it was, about a foot away. I went around the post, found Stan's bed, walked over to my own, and sat down.

"Not bad," Carl said, "not bad at all." He leaned over to help with the brace. "But that's enough on that leg for today. I'll come around tomorrow and we'll take a walk through the ward and maybe down the corridor to the ramp."

After he'd gone I lay there as excited as a kid. I'd walked, by heaven, and I hadn't fallen down or even bumped into anything. It was a tremendous sensation, one that made me feel full of vitality and optimism. Lying in bed wasn't any fun any more. I wanted to get up and be on the move.

For an hour I rested. The excitement didn't die

down in the least, so I took the brace off the bedside chair and sat with it in my hands. The metal felt cool to the touch, the leather soft. This was the thing that let me walk. I bent over and adjusted it to my leg. I didn't know whether or not anyone was watching me, but nobody said anything. Clutching the cane, I slid out of bed and walked off. I headed for the washroom door, trying to remember the things Carl had taught me. My cane came in contact with something strange and I reached out my hand. It was a drinking-fountain. I let the cold water bubble into my mouth while I figured out the next move. Already I had stopped straining my eyes. They felt relaxed and almost normal. I followed the mat to the entrance to our ward. Voices came from across the corridor, from another ward. I stood there wondering whether I had the nerve to move down the hall, when Betty swung round the corner, almost knocking me down. She stepped back in surprise, holding herself up by clutching my bathrobe.

“Why, Barry! I didn’t know you’d started walking.”

I smirked at her. “Listen, Betty, you’ve heard of Admiral Byrd, of Lewis and Clark, of La Salle? I’m an explorer, too, only this is my initial expedition. How’m I doin’?”

“Terrific, soldier, only where are you planning to go in pajamas and bathrobe?”

“I can think of places where they’d be very appropriate. Bedrooms, for instance.”

“You flatter yourself, soldier. What you need is a few more weeks of rest. Come on, I’ll walk back to your bed with you.”

She took hold of my arm and we went back together. Betty smoothed the covers. “It’s good to see you on your feet, Barry.” Her voice was so warm and genuine that I longed to be able to see her. It’s hard to figure out at first what people are thinking. All you have to judge by is the voice, and that can lie. After a while, you learn to read the voice, but until you do, it’s easy to distrust what you hear.

Betty's tones were understanding and sincere. Her cowpoke couldn't have known what he was missing.

Betty's footsteps dwindled away and I realized suddenly that I was extremely tired. The excitement over walking had cooled off somewhat, but it had left me content. I hit the sack and dozed off, feeling disgustingly smug.

From that time on, I walked everywhere I went. Carl supervised my trips to the clinics and had me practice over and over how to get to various places and how to do things. With eyes, I might have found him overconscientious and perhaps even namby-pamby; without them, he was a good friend and a fine teacher.

One day Carl didn't show up in time for the trip to the eye clinic, so I started out by myself. I got out into the corridor all right and down the hall; but by the time I'd gone up and down several ramps and had wound up in the next wing, I knew I was lost. It annoyed me to have to ask anyone

my way; so I kept going. Twenty minutes and three corridors later, I heard voices in a room to the left and thought it was the eye clinic. I turned in triumphantly and walked about twenty feet. I bumped into a counter.

“Good afternoon, sir,” said a girl’s voice. “Did you want to pay your telephone bill?”

“My phone bill?” I could feel red creeping over my face. “Well, uh—not right now. I—guess I’m in the wrong place.”

I headed in the direction I’d come from, bumping into the door on my way out. My hand holding the cane was slippery with perspiration. Off to the right came the clicking of high heels. I spoke loudly in their direction. “Pardon me, miss. Is this the eye clinic?”

“No, it isn’t.” She gave a little laugh. “It’s the Red Cross. I am going to the eye clinic, though. Do you mind if I walk along with you?”

“Not at all. Thanks.”

When the eye clinic had finished with me, I

started back to the ward. I got to where I thought the ramp should be, and it wasn't there. I was lost again. I turned and went down a long corridor until I came to an intersection. As I stood there wondering what to do next, Betty found me. "For Pete's sake, where do you think you're going? You couldn't be any farther from your own ward unless you left the building."

"Holy mackerel, Betty, am I glad to see you! This is awful."

"If you went any farther you'd be in the room where they wait for the buses. Stay right there for a minute. I have to drop these papers off down the hall then I'll walk back with you."

We took our time going back. I asked Betty what she looked like.

"Hedy Lamarr," she said.

"Aw, come on. No kidding, what do you look like? What color's your hair?"

"Blond, sort of."

"What do you mean, sort of?"

“Well, it’s sort of dark blond.”

“Like brown sugar?”

She giggled. “Well, nobody ever put it quite that way before.”

“What color are your eyes?”

“Plain old brown, like dirt.”

“And I’d say you were, oh, about five four, and maybe about a hundred and twenty pounds?”

“That’s close enough. I don’t want to disillusion you.”

“I suppose all the patients fall in love with you.”

“Oh, yes, especially the ones who can’t see me. I forgot to tell you that I’m sixty years old.”

I stopped short and Betty laughed until she could hardly talk. “What’s so funny?” I asked.

“You. Don’t you love me any more now that I’m old and wrinkled?”

I put out my hand and touched her face. It was soft and smooth, unlined. “Liar,” I said.

Betty put her fingers around my wrist and

turned me away from her. "Here's the ward, soldier. Stop making passes at the help."

I stopped her from entering by grabbing her arm. "Betty, since your guy got killed, have you ever thought of falling for somebody else?"

"No, Barry, nobody. So if you're harboring any lascivious notions—"

"Don't be silly. All of us are a little in love with you."

"Normal symptoms. Come on now, soldier, back to bed."

Not long after my talk with Betty, the hospital issued me a complete outfit of G.I. clothes. It was the tip-off to my first trip downtown. Carl brought the clothes in and helped me to dress. I could feel the crispness of the shirt and the crease in my trousers. The tie gave me a little trouble at first, but pretty soon habit took over and I got it tied. Carefully I wet my hair and slicked it down, shaved with an electric razor, and shrugged into my blouse. My hands shook so that Carl had to help

me now and then, but the knowledge that I was well groomed made me feel less helpless. By the time we were ready to leave, my hands were cold and covered with perspiration.

After I'd cocked my cap at the proper angle, Carl briefed me. "Look. Just touch my right elbow lightly with your left hand and relax. Remember that: just relax. Walk along easily and naturally. Don't worry about obstructions, because that's my job. Take a firmer hold when we're getting in and out of the bus to prevent lurching. I'll let you know when we come to curbings by pressing my elbow against your hand. I'll slow down at curbings, too. One more thing. When you feel my right elbow press closer to my own body, you'll know there's not enough room for two at that place, so that will be a cue for you to fall a little behind and to the rear. Get it?"

"I guess so. Come on."

I picked up my cane and we started out of the ward. The ramps and corridors and intersections

were all familiar to me now. Getting around the hospital had become automatic, but as soon as we came into the bustle of the waiting-room, I began to feel uncertain. We were several minutes early, but the wait seemed much longer than that. Carl joked with other men in the room and I heard him make plans with somebody to go into town that evening for a beer. Finally I heard wheels crunch over the gravel drive. Somebody, an M.P., I think, held the rest of the group until Carl and I had boarded. I fumbled my way up the handrail, and Carl explained how to find an empty seat. "It's a cinch," he said. "All you do is run your free hand, the one not holding your cane, over the corner of the backs of the seats. If the seat's occupied, your hand will touch a shoulder. Go ahead and try it."

On the way in town Carl kept up a stream of conversation to cover my nervousness. The sounds that had been so important at the hospital—voices, footsteps, kitchen noises, clinic sounds, fans—were all gone. I felt lost and rather frightened.

We climbed off the bus in Phoenixville and walked the length of the main street and back. Carl told me where certain shops and stores were located and I even bought a few odds and ends I'd been needing. Phoenixville seemed to be a pleasant, ordinary, middle-class town, with a main street and the usual collection of shops.

Before getting back on the bus, we stopped in the Red Cross Lounge in the town for a smoke. Nothing unusual happened on the whole trip—no accidents, no cruel laughter, no embarrassing moments. Except for the strangeness, it went as smoothly as my walks around the hospital.

When we got back to the ward, I was filled with a sense of exhilaration. Hurriedly I put my new clothes away in my locker and climbed into bed. I was tired, but too keyed up to sleep. Instead, I sent for a gray lady, who wrote several letters for me to my friends and the folks. Telling my family turned out to be easier than I'd expected, because suddenly I realized that there couldn't be anything to

tell them but the truth. The words came out almost of their own volition:

“I’m in Valley Forge Hospital here in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. To say that I’m ill is silly—actually I’m quite sound. As you may have heard, however, this is a hospital for those who have injured their eyes or lost their eyesight. I was hit by a shell fragment in Germany, and as a result I’m totally blind. Please don’t let this be too much of a shock to you. Everyone here is wonderful to me. The food is good, my legs are healing, the other patients are a great bunch. As for my eyes, I’ll never be able to see again, but the scars will barely show and I’m learning to get around by myself with not much trouble.

“I think of you all often and miss you. Please get used to me this way. If I can, you can. It won’t be too long before they give me a furlough home. It’ll seem like old times to be together again.”

## CHAPTER SIX

SLOWLY but surely, as time passed, things took on a pattern. Where before they had been fragments and shadows, they assumed definite shapes and forms. Practice and routine, routine and practice were molding my activities into recognizable, tangible familiarities. The doctors, the nurses, the patients became individuals. Even some of the regular visitors to the ward could be recognized by their voices or footsteps. Betty was the one with the quick, light steps; Carl sounded as if he were always in a hurry; and Mrs. Roberts skipped as she walked, almost like a child. Stan's voice was the deep, chuckling one; and Foley's sounded strident, forceful.

A week after I had written the letter home, a strange voice spoke to me. "Sergeant Henry Barry?"

"That's right. Who are you?"

"Johnson's the name. Corporal. You're wanted on the phone. I'll take you there."

He guided me down a corridor to a phone booth. "You can take it in there. I'll wait."

Johnson closed the door behind me and I picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

There was no answer. Again I said: "Sergeant Barry here. Hello? Hello."

On the other end of the line a small voice burst out: "Dad?"

I grinned broadly. "Donny? Yes, it's Dad. Hi son. How are you?"

There was nothing but silence on the other end of the line. My hand started to sweat on the phone. "Hello, Donny? Dad's here. Hello."

I listened, but all I could hear were sobs.

"It's all right, Donny. Look, things will be the

same as they always were pretty soon. I'm coming home on furlough in a few weeks and I'll be home for good some day soon."

I shifted the receiver to my other hand, wiping the perspiration off on my pajama leg. "Don, don't cry. Stop crying."

I tried a couple more times, then I heard a click at the other end. "Donny!" Frantically I jiggled the receiver.

The voice of the operator intoned: "I'm sorry, sir, but your party has hung up. The call has been disconnected."

Slowly I replaced the receiver. Johnson swung back the door and touched my arm. "What is it, sergeant? Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes. Sure." I wiped my hands and face on my handkerchief. "I'm all right. Take me back now, will you, please?"

"Of course, sergeant. Come with me."

Back in bed, I debated about calling Donny myself. Then I decided against it. I thought that per-

haps he only needed more time to get used to the idea that I was blind; but for several days I was uneasy over his phone call.

Shortly after Donny had called, Betty came to my bed and said casually: "Mailman, sarge. You've a letter from two young men named Donny and Junior."

I took a deep breath. "Read it, will you? This is the first letter since they heard about me."

There was a ripping noise as she tore open the envelope, and paper crackled when she smoothed out the letter.

"It was written two days ago," she said. She started to read. "'Dear Uncle Patsy—' Hey, something's wrong. Wait a minute."

She glanced at the signature. "It's signed by Don and Junior all right. Who's Uncle Patsy?"

"My ex-wife's brother. They must have put the wrong letter in the right envelope. Patsy must've got the letter they wrote to me."

Betty began to chuckle. "Listen to this, sarge."

She read: “‘Dear Uncle Patsy, Our Daddy is a hero! He’s in the hospital, because the Germans shot his eyes. He’s a big hero. He . . .’”

Betty continued to read, but I stopped listening. The words sank deeper and deeper into me. The boys weren’t ashamed of me. They didn’t pity me. They thought I was a hero. My sons were proud of me. Wait a minute, though. Perhaps they didn’t really know what it meant to be blind. Obviously, they couldn’t know it meant uncertainty, faltering, thousands of daily failures. But did these things matter to them? Maybe not. I could still teach them what I knew, joke with them, take them places. At least, I could after my training had been completed. It might even be fun, like a game. Donny’s phone call must have been put in just after he heard the news, but since then he’d had time to absorb what had happened and reconcile himself to it.

Betty smoothed the covers. “Stop grinning, hero.

You're a long way from home plate. You're only standing on first base, you know."

"Just watch me, Betty. I'm headed for a home run."

"Sure you are, sarge." Her voice was very soft. "Everybody's rooting for you."

The day after Don and Junior's letter came, I heard someone stop by the bed. I waited. A few seconds went by; I could hear breathing, but no one spoke.

"Who's there?" I asked finally. "Who is it?"

Someone touched my hand as it lay on the cover. "It's Margaret, Henry. Margaret and Jimmy."

My sister. Her voice was shy and frightened.

I reached out my arms to her and she held me tight for a minute. "Oh, Henry—you're all right?"

"Sure, honey, sure. Lord, it's good to hear your voice."

"You look well, Henry. Doesn't he, Jim?"

Jim and I shook hands. His grip was strong and warm. "You do, Henry. You look fine. We didn't know what to expect, but certainly not that you'd look as rugged as you do."

I laughed. "They've been feeding me up for the kill. When did you get here? Why didn't you let me know you were coming? How long can you stay?"

"We wrote we were coming, Henry. Something must have happened to the letter. We came down from Boston on the bus and it took all night. It's awful, Henry, but we have to go right back. Jim can't stay away from work more than one day right now. It's just that we had to see for ourselves how you were. And I'm glad we came. Now we won't have to guess any longer."

"Sometimes," I said, "when things don't go right, I wish I were dead. Most of the time, it's funny, I'm almost eager to lick being blind. At first I felt defeated most of the time, but now it's the other way round. Occasionally the blues come on for no ap-

parent reason or because I've made some stupid little blunder. But they're growing farther apart every day. I wake up excited, anxious to see what I can overcome, what obstacle I can jump over."

Margaret said, eagerly: "When you come home, we'll do everything we can to help you. Won't we, Jim?"

"Don't press me, that's all. It'll work out if I'm not pushed."

"I understand, Henry." She rose and, leaning over, kissed my cheek. "Good-by, Henry. If there's anything we can do, let us know."

"There's nothing, Margaret. So long, Jim." I smiled at them both. "Thanks for coming. Tell the boys—and Dad—that I'll be home in a month on furlough."

"Are you kidding?" Jim said incredulously.

"You know my orienter I've written home about, Carl Hamilton? Well, he's been with me morning and afternoon. I can get around this whole hospital by myself now, and after Carl had shown me

the ropes, I even went downtown by myself a few times.”

“Really, Henry? By yourself?”

“Sure,” I lied. “It isn’t as hard as it sounds. It’s like anything else. The more you do it, the easier it is. I’ll tell you what, I don’t think even you can get back to the waiting-room without asking directions. I’ll bet you a dollar that I can get you back there without once getting lost or asking the way. What do you say?”

“You’re on,” Jim said enthusiastically.

I fitted the brace to my leg, put on my bathrobe, and grabbed my cane. “Follow me. I’ll show you how to get out of this place.”

They trailed me down the ramps, through the corridors, and past several intersections. Finally, hearing some people walk by, I pointed with my cane in the direction they had taken. “There you are, folks. The waiting-room’s right down this hall.”

Margaret and Jim laughed and shook my hand.

Margaret kissed me on the cheek again. "You do get around well, Henry. Good-by again. We'll see you on your furlough."

Funny thing, though, they walked off in the opposite direction from the one I'd pointed out.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

**S**ECRETLY I rather dreaded the thought of going home. I was excited about it, eager to see the boys and my family, anxious to prove I could manage; but it didn't seem possible that I was ready for it. I thought of the bus, the train, the cabs, the subway, the millions of steps, the thousands of doorways, the hundreds of unfamiliar places I'd have to get about in, and the idea almost overwhelmed me.

My preliminary rehabilitation was over. Physically my leg had healed to the point where I got around comfortably with the use of the brace. The

operations on my face and eyelids were finished and plastic eyes had been inserted. I didn't look any different from ordinary people with sight. At least, so Carl said, and I believed him. After the eyes had had a few preliminary fittings to stretch the lids, they had been put in for good—a painless process. They were perfectly matched, they were unbreakable, and, best of all, they rotated. That meant there was none of the glassy stare commonly associated with the blind. There was some scar tissue, but it was disappearing bit by bit and was not too unsightly.

The hospital, the grounds, the local bus, the town of Phoenixville had all become comfortably familiar, thanks to Carl's patient understanding. Now came the transplanting—furlough.

We had been briefed time and again on the situations involved in travel. Carrying our canes, crook outward, tip close to floor; taking daily trips to town, first with an escort, then alone; walking up hundreds of steps—wooden ones, stone ones,

metal ones—bus steps, train steps, house steps; walking miles of corridors, drives, streets, lawns, rooms, sidewalks; we'd been checked out on curbs, doorways, crossings, entering and leaving buildings, elevators, escalators, revolving doors; we'd had rehearsals and dress rehearsals until we were sick of them.

Simple. Nothing to it. I'd done it all too much. Yet the night before I left, I lay awake for hours, frightened. I reviewed my short life in darkness. First, the shot itself, in Germany. Then hospitals in France, in England, on Long Island, and at last here, at Valley Forge. Ambulance, train, plane, and ambulance again. The soul-shocking news that I was stone-blind. I'd wanted to die then, but I hadn't died, and now I didn't want to any more. There had been Major Laughton, kind and amusing; Betty, always considerate, always teasing; Carl—I couldn't have lived without him, or someone just like him. Stan and Foley and Mrs. Roberts and Emma. I was the hub, they were the spokes.

The rim was the whole wide world that they held me to.

Toward morning, I went to sleep.

At noon on the day my furlough began I got on the bus to Phoenixville. The men were noisily excited and the bus filled quickly with smoke as cigarettes were lighted. I touched my Braille watch lightly. There was plenty of time to make the train. The man in the next seat, a sighted civilian, was going into Philadelphia himself and he was kind enough to help me buy a ticket. At the Thirtieth Street Station I changed trains. While waiting for the right one to come in, I killed time by attempting to identify sounds. I could hear, of course, the shuffling of many feet and the noise of luggage being shifted about. Occasionally someone struck a match. Automobile horns sounded outside the station, and once a freight rolled in with a great rush of acrid-smelling smoke and a loud thunder of wheels. I kept touching my watch nervously.

With a roar, my train stopped in front of the

platform, and the conductor guided me into the train. I turned into the car alone to find an empty seat. I walked down the aisle, my fingers trailing over the back of the chairs. Finally I came to one that didn't seem to be occupied, so I sat down. I sat in a girl's lap. Quickly I rose and apologized, but my face and neck flamed red. There was a long moment of silence and I was about to move on down the car when she spoke.

“Don't apologize. It's quite all right. I just got on the train myself and I must have been daydreaming. Won't you sit down again? I've moved over.”

“Thanks. Gosh, I'm really sorry. I hope I didn't hurt you when I sat on you.”

“Hurt me?” She laughed. “I rather enjoyed it. There's a man shortage, you know.”

I smiled and introduced myself.

“My name is Mary Bruer,” she said. “I'm on my way home to Albany.” She was quiet for another minute, then she said: “Is this your first trip home from Valley Forge Hospital?”

“Yes, it is. But I didn’t know it showed.”

“Tell me about the hospital. They say it’s the best of its kind in the world.”

For almost an hour I explained the hospital and the sort of work done there. She was full of questions, and the time went quickly.

As we approached New York, she said: “I’ve a newspaper here. Would you like me to read a little to you?” She hesitated over the words.

I smiled reassuringly toward her. “I’d like it very much, Mary,” I said.

Until the train pulled into Penn Station, she read to me and we argued amiably over each article. She stayed with me until I boarded the train for Brooklyn. When I was about to step off the platform, she shook hands with me and then leaned over and kissed me on the cheek.

“The best of luck, Henry,” she whispered, “the very best of luck.”

Her lips were soft against my face, and the kiss stayed on my cheek a long time.

The subway door closed behind me. I turned to the right, and almost at once a man's voice said: "Sit down here, soldier."

I felt peculiar taking a seat when I couldn't tell whether or not the car was crowded, but at the moment there didn't seem to be any alternative. I sat down, wondering what I'd have done if it had been a woman who'd offered me a seat. That was one situation they hadn't prepared us for at Valley Forge. The man next to me, who had told me where to sit, said he'd let me know when we arrived at my stop. I remembered Carl saying: "Don't worry, there's always somebody around who'll help you out."

Two little boys—they sounded ten or twelve years old—noticed my cane and after much whispering worked up the courage to ask about it. They argued over who would do the talking, and finally one of them said: "Why've you got a white cane, mister?"

“It makes it easier to see on the street or in traffic.”

“Why’s it got a red tip?”

“I don’t know, really. But canes this color are used by blind people all over, so other people will know it when they see them.”

“Do your eyes hurt?” one of the boys asked.

The other one whispered loudly: “Shut up, dopey.”

I smiled toward them. “I don’t mind. No, they don’t hurt—not now, anyway.”

“Did you get hurt in the war?”

“Yep.”

“Gee! By a Nazi?”

“That’s right.”

One of them went “Eh-eh-eh-eh,” like children imitating a machine gun. The second boy pretended to be a sniper. “Pting,” he whined, “pting, pting!”

The man on my other side gave me a nudge.

“Want me to shut those kids up, sergeant?”

“No, they don’t bother me much. Guess I’ll have to get used to it, anyway.”

“Yeah, there sure are some nosy people in the world. What have you got there, glass eyes?”

“No. Plastic.”

He whistled admiringly. “Well, what do you know! Plastic, eh? Say, you ought to wear dark glasses, then nobody’d know.”

I was getting embarrassed. “I’m not wearing them now and *you* didn’t know it.”

“Yeah, but I knew there was something funny the minute I saw you.”

The car wheels began to squeal. Turning to the man who had directed me to a seat, I asked: “Is this my stop?” I hoped fervently that it was.

“Huh? Oh, yeah, yeah. This is yours, soldier. So long, now. Take it easy.”

“So long.”

I followed the crowd through the door and someone guided me up the ramp to the exit. There

I hailed a cab to my brother Bill's. I hadn't seen him since my first day back in the States. I rang the bell and waited. When Bill opened the door there was a loud gasp, then he yelled: "Henry! Henry, you old son-of-a-gun! Hey, everybody, look who's here!"

Josie and the four children rushed at me in a body, Josie pulled me into the living-room, while the children tugged at my clothes and swarmed all over me. I scooped the littlest one up in my arms and together we almost fell into a chair.

Over the confusion, Bill said: "Where's your escort, Henry? Why didn't he come in with you?"

"Hah! I came alone."

"Who're you kidding?"

"Honest, Bill, I did. I came alone. Except that I sat on a girl's lap on the train, it wasn't nearly as bad as I'd expected. Everybody wants to help. It's wonderful the way everybody came up to me. At every stop or change or transfer, people came up and asked if they could do anything for me. I

didn't know there were that many nice people in the world. Now I'm this far, I'll get home alone if it kills me."

I knew just how Bill looked, sitting across from me, shaking his head in disbelief. All he could say, over and over, was: "Well, what do you know about that? What do you know about that?"

It was a triumphant occasion. I laughed from the sheer pleasure of it.

I stayed in Brooklyn for a couple of days. It wasn't bad at all, except for a few little incidents that were really no one's fault. People forgot that I couldn't see and frequently asked me to hand them something or to do something that was an impossibility. Actually, I liked that to happen, because it meant that they had forgotten I was blind, that they accepted me as a person, not as a blind man. I learned to say: "Look, I'm a sick man. *You're* supposed to wait on *me*," or "Sorry. I'm not allowed to exert myself. Doctor's orders." This

usually got a laugh, but it served as a reminder at the same time.

From Brooklyn I went on to Boston. Two old friends met the train. We hadn't seen each other since before the war. They shook my hand and slapped me on the back, but then they lapsed into that embarrassed silence which even I had learned to expect from some people.

"Come on, you two," I said, "let's go into the cafeteria and have a sandwich and a cup of coffee. I'm starving."

They both tried to grab my arm at the same time.

"Hold on," I laughed, "there are a couple of little things you two ought to know. When you're walking along with me, instead of grabbing my arm and trying to lead me, I'll take hold of yours and just walk along beside you. Tell me when we get to a curb and there'll be nothing to it."

One of them took my suitcase and I held the

other one's arm. In that way we went to the cafeteria, where we sat down and ordered lunch.

There was another little silence, so I said: "O.K., ask me. What do you want to know?"

"How long are you going to be home, Barry?" Jim asked.

"A little less than a month. I used up a few days of my furlough with my brother in Brooklyn."

"Then what happens?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean do you have to go back to the hospital?"

"Not for long. Then comes eighteen weeks at a school in Connecticut."

"Eighteen weeks! That's a long haul."

I lit a cigarette and leaned forward. "Jim, this business is like being born again. Almost everything I learned to do with eyes I have to learn to do without them. Eighteen weeks isn't long compared with thirty-odd years."

Jim sounded contrite. "Sorry. I didn't mean anything."

"I know. I didn't mean to preach a sermon myself. This is a funny deal, you know it? It's hard to put into words, but it's something like this: I'm blind. Nothing and nobody can ever change that. But what I do about it, how I feel about it, even how others feel, is something over which I, personally, have full control. I can make myself happy or I can make myself sad. I can be upset or angry or indifferent, all from inside myself. I haven't learned full control of these things yet, but I'm going to learn. I already know that you're only as blind as you let yourself be, and that's the first step." I took a deep breath. "Pardon the soapbox, friends. I was talking to myself, out loud."

Johnny, my other buddy, said: "Will you be able to work, Henry? Can the Connecticut school get you a job?"

"I don't know. From what I've heard, there's nothing they can't do. They'll teach me almost

anything I choose, but I guess it's up to me to find a job. I'll get one all right, once I'm a civilian again."

"Maybe you can find a job right in Brockton when your training's over."

"I'm going to try, anyway. Look, will you put me on the bus for home? The boys are waiting." I rose from the table and put down some change. "This has been great—let's do it again before I go back. But I feel as if I'm about to go up before the judge and I want to get it over with."

The short bus ride home seemed to last forever. Each time the bus picked up a little speed, I could feel the brakes being applied again. People climbed on and off until it seemed as if there couldn't be that many people in the entire world. I smoked one cigarette after another. At last we stopped in Brockton. I heard the doors swish back, people get off, coins clink as others boarded the bus. Then someone took my arm.

"Hello, Henry. Here we are."

“Margaret! Where are the boys?”

“At their mother’s, Henry. They’re waiting for you to call.”

Margaret guided me off the bus and over to where Jim waited with his car. I stumbled getting in and went down on one knee. Margaret and Jim both clutched at me. “It’s all right,” I said. I brushed off my knees and settled into the back seat. My face was red, I knew, and the uncomfortable silence had come back.

As we drove along, I forgot all that. I remembered exactly what everything looked like. Each turn was familiar; the traffic, the pedestrians, the lights and signs and buildings were vivid in my mind.

I turned to Margaret. “Is the sun out?”

“Yes. What a funny thing to ask!”

“Not really. I always feel better when I know the sun is shining. I feel better now. Jim,” I added, “we just passed the viaduct, didn’t we? Aren’t we almost to your house?”

“Only a minute now, Henry. How’d you know we passed the viaduct?”

I laughed. “Easy. I recognized the washboard road.”

Margaret and I went into the house, and Jim drove the car around to the garage. I went into the kitchen and drank two tall glasses of water—suddenly I was terribly thirsty. Then I went directly to the phone and called the boys. Their mother said she would send them right over.

While we waited, Margaret rambled on about rationing and shortages. She was trying desperately to keep the conversation moving, but I was too nervous to be polite.

After about twenty minutes the bell rang. Margaret answered the door. Slowly I rose to my feet. At first the boys moved hesitatingly; then with a rush they threw themselves on me. Donny, the bigger one, clutched me around the neck, and Junior wrapped both arms around my legs. Both of them talked at once, the words loud and normal and en-

thusiastic. Under my hand, their heads were smooth and warm.

Finally, I said: "Hey, you sure you're mine? You're taller than the boys I left behind." I knelt down and put my arms around them. "Kind of fat, too, aren't you?"

Donny placed his fingers beside my eyes. "Gee, Dad, you don't look much different. Are you sick? Can you take us swimming?"

"You bet we'll go swimming."

Junior spoke derisively to Don. "Course he's not sick. Else they wouldn't have let him come home from the hospital, would they, Dad?" He turned eagerly back to me. "Let's go to the lake, Dad. When can we go?"

"As soon as I can arrange it. Tomorrow, maybe."

Donny interrupted. "You never sent me the five dollars for the dog. Why didn't you?"

I messed his hair. "I was kind of sick then, Don. But listen, we'll buy a dog, if it's all right with your mother. And tomorrow we'll go up to the lake

for a couple of weeks. What do you say?"

The boys cheered and danced around me. I leaned back in the chair, smiling widely. So far, so good, but behind my back I crossed my fingers.

The next day was hot. The boys couldn't go to the lake until the following day, so a friend of mine, Don Santry, suggested that he and I drop in on an old friend of ours who had opened a bar and grill on Main Street.

Don and I sat on tall stools at the bar and ordered cold beer. Several men I had known trooped over to shake hands. One or two of them mentioned my eyes, saying how sorry they were to have heard the news. Suddenly someone slapped me hard on the shoulder.

"You won't remember me, Barry," a loud voice said, "because you can't see me. Tough luck you're blind, old man. I know you'd remember me right away if you could see me." Turning to the bartender, he said: "Give him another bottle of beer. I'll pay for it."

I said as quietly as I could: "Thanks, but I don't care for another beer. I was just leaving."

"Come on," the man boomed out, "have another beer on me. I'll buy a dozen if you want them. Nothing's too good for you poor fellows."

Abruptly I realized that the room had become quiet. I sensed the listening and I froze.

The man continued talking. "Here's a package of cigarettes, too," he said. His voice fell confidentially. "And look, fella, you don't have to worry about a thing. Everything's going to be all right, even if you can't see again." He thumped me playfully on the shoulder. "We're all your friends here and we'll do everything we can for you."

"Thank you," I said. "Thank you very much. But I'm afraid we'll have to go now."

The man held me down with a hand on my shoulder. "Keep your chin up, soldier, and life won't be as bad as you expect. I wouldn't be surprised if some day you met a nice little blind girl and married her." He called to the bartender:

“Come on, give this poor fellow a drink. It’s on me.”

I felt myself go white with anger. Standing, I faced the man. “Mister, you’re blinder right now than I’ll ever be. Keep your money. I’m getting out of here.” I groped for Don. I was shaking and couldn’t locate him.

The man with the loud voice said: “Keep your shirt on, soldier. I was only trying to be charitable.”

Don came quietly to my side. “All right, Henry. Let’s go.”

The man called after us: “Don’t get mad, sarge. Come on, have a beer. I’ll pay for it.”

Out on the street again, I held tightly to Don’s arm. He had enough sense to wait quietly until I had control of myself again. Then I had an idea. “Don,” I said, “listen. Go back in there and give this money to the bartender. Tell him to put a couple of beers in front of that loud-mouthed clown, and in a nice, loud voice, so that everybody in the

place can hear, tell him it's on Barry, the poor blind fellow."

Don laughed. "Will do," he said, and went back into the bar.

I waited, feeling that I'd evened the score.

When Don came out, he put an arm across my shoulders. "You had a rough deal, Henry."

"Yes. You know, I've heard about men like him. Never thought I'd run into one, somehow. No wonder some of the men at the hospital are afraid to stick their necks out."

The following day the boys and I left for two weeks at the lake. Jim drove us up and left us alone. I knew the cottage from long ago, and I remembered the paths and the location of the water. The three of us got along fine. The boys seemed to take their cues from me. They never rushed me, they didn't waste any time on feeling sorry for me, and they helped me over the rough moments with unerring instinct. I've tasted better cooking and

slept on smoother beds, but those little things didn't bother us at all. I lay in the sun for hours, letting it bake the stiffness out of my leg.

Once, lying by the lake, I had an uncomfortable moment. The boys were giggling as they poked with sticks at a snapping turtle. Down in the water a frog croaked, and over our heads the trees were full of singing birds. I shuddered, remembering the last time I'd sat by the water. It had been the Roer River. My unit was supposed to cross the Roer in a flatboat, but something had gone wrong with the motor. Machine-gun bullets had been splattering around us, so it was either row across or get shot. We started over. A shell burst with a roar off to starboard and I felt something hit my chest. I looked down and noticed that the life preserver had been torn off my chest by a piece of shrapnel. There were six bandoleers of cartridges around my neck, and two pouches of hand grenades attached to the cartridge belt. They hadn't

been touched. The men had started to jump out of the boat and I had to jump with them, ammunition and all, before it was too late. I sank immediately. My mouth had opened and the bloody river water poured down my throat. I don't know what happened right after that, except that somehow I had made the shore. I had crawled on my stomach toward the American-held bridge when I was hit in the leg by another piece of shrapnel. I'd kept going on my hands and knees until I was challenged by three G.I.'s. They looked as though they were sitting on the ground. When I got closer, I saw that two of them had both legs missing below the knee and that the third man's legs were both broken. The four of us sat there together by the river until the medics found us. After my wound was treated, I'd rejoined my unit.

Even the sun felt cold that day by the lake until I forced myself to remember that it was over. It was the now that mattered.

. . .

When my furlough was up, I said good-by to the family and took the train for Philadelphia. I was bone-tired and ready to go back to a familiar routine. Furlough had been wonderful. My family and friends were understanding and hadn't been too maudlin about me, but still I looked forward to getting back. Somehow, I felt that I needed more self-assurance and confidence to cope with everyday affairs.

I thought over the past month at home. On the whole, it had been fun, but a few things had rubbed me the wrong way. For instance, some people seemed to think it miraculous because I could walk, talk, hold up my end of a conversation. They were amazed that I knew the standings of the ball clubs, could eat without help, and light my own cigarette. In other words, they acted as if I'd lost my mentality along with my eyesight.

One day I'd been walking down Main Street with a friend when we'd met an acquaintance of ours. We all shook hands and then the fellow had

turned to the man with me and asked: "How is he, anyway?" Meaning me.

Not long after that the same friend went with me to the home of an older couple who had been friends of ours since we were children. The woman had offered us a cup of coffee. When she started to pour, she turned to my friend and asked: "Does he take one lump or two?" I almost said: "Who's going to drink it, him or me?" but I let it pass without comment.

Generally, though, people had been considerate, even eager to assist in any way possible. There were times, nonetheless, when I thought it would be a good idea to let us fellows go home and send the sighted ones to school. Some of the more sensitive vets—I could think of several—wouldn't be able to stand the more brutal treatment.

I realized that time was an ally of mine, not the enemy that most people thought it was. Time had softened the edges of my misery, it had blurred the outlines of pain. Time had brought fresh interests

and introduced new pleasures. In doing so, it had mellowed my grief and strengthened me to bear the burden of blindness.

I had plenty of time and I was gradually learning to utilize it.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

**S**EPTEMBER and October went quickly. I'd been back from furlough only a few days when the doctor decided I needed one last small operation on my eyelids. My legs strengthened steadily. Mrs. Roberts came to the ward regularly, sometimes with Emma, and Commander Brown dropped in once in a while.

One day, true to his word, Commander Brown invited the entire ward to a party at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel in Philadelphia. We went in buses with the nurses and orientation girls as escorts. They gave us a huge roast-beef dinner and entertainment; and afterward there was dancing. I had

the first dance with Betty. In the beginning I was rather stiff, but within a very few moments dancing was as much fun as it had been before. The only difference was that, for obvious reasons, the girls had to ask the men to dance.

On a Friday night shortly after the trip to Philly a group of us sat around the ward listening to the fights on the radio. During one of the prelims Foley sighed. "Mmmm," he said, "a couple of cold beers would certainly hit the spot."

We all agreed, but no one could think of a way to get them. Then a strange voice broke into our conversation. "If I could get a pass, I'd be glad to get some for you. But you men are the only ones issued passes this late."

Everyone said: "Hi," and I asked the stranger his name.

"Jack Brandon," he said. "I'm from another ward. Just came to see a man from my old outfit who's in this ward, but he's asleep."

"Listen," I said, "I've got it! The night nurse is

out of the ward. Tom, you go into her office and pick up a pass. Any pass will do. The rest of you come over here.” I opened the locker and took out my blouse and cap. “Jack, I sure hope these fit you.”

“Look,” Brandon said, “I’ll try anything once, but how do you expect me to get past the guard? He’ll know I’m not from this ward.”

“Don’t worry. When you leave here, you’ll look like a full-fledged member of the blind ward.” I turned to one of the other men. “Call a taxi from Phoenixville. Tell the driver to come to the back entrance of Ward One.”

He went to the phone, and Tom gave Brandon the pass.

“I still don’t see how I’m going to get away with it,” Jack said.

“Here.” I handed him a pair of dark glasses. “Put these on and take this cane. Now come on.”

We all walked to the entrance of the back stairs with him.

“Remember,” I said, “don’t give the play away to the cab-driver. Let him help you in and out of the cab.”

“I’ll probably be thrown in the cooler for impersonating a blind man.”

When the taxi pulled up, its wheels crunching on the drive, the driver stepped out and took hold of Jack’s arm. “Here you are, soldier. Let me help you in.”

Brandon mumbled something appropriate and the taxi drove off. We went back into the ward to wait.

About half an hour later, we heard the back door close. Rushing out, we grabbed Brandon and the beer and dragged them up to the ward.

“Come on. Give. What happened?”

Jack began to laugh. “That cab-driver is scared cross-eyed. He thinks he had a loony in his cab.”

“How come?”

“Did you hear him drive away from here?”

“No. What happened?”

“I’ll bet he was doing seventy by the time he hit the main road. He stepped on the gas and high-tailed it out of here like all the demons in hell were after him. On the way out, the guard stopped us at the gate. He took one look at the cane and dark glasses and waved us on. In a minute I took off the glasses and laid them on the seat with the cane. When we got to the store in town, I jumped out and told the cabby I could handle it myself. I went in and bought a case of beer, and when I came out with it under my arm, he stood there and stared at me. He didn’t say a word coming back, but when we were about halfway, he turned around quickly to see what I was doing. The glasses and cane were still on the seat and I was smoking a cigarette. He looked horrified, but he didn’t say a word. Just before we got to the guard, I put the glasses back on and took the cane in my hand. We pulled up to the guard’s station and the driver turned all the way around. When he saw me with the glasses and cane, I thought he’d get out and

start running. I stared back at him. We got back here, and I tapped him on the shoulder from the back seat and handed him the right fare. He jumped about a foot and dropped most of the change on the floor. As soon as I set foot on the ground, he roared off.”

Everyone was laughing at Jack’s story. “Gosh,” I said, “now we’ve done it. That’s probably the last time one of the town cabbies will answer a call from Ward One.”

At any rate, it was the last time I called for a cab from there, because two days later we left Valley Forge. When the transfer came through, I packed my few belongings, gave my beloved radio to a new patient, and along with the rest of the men boarded the special bus for the Old Farms Convalescent Hospital in Avon, Connecticut.

Avon, the unknown quantity. There had been plenty of talk, both pro and con, and, to be honest, most of it was definitely pro. The night before we left, I added up what I’d heard about the place.

Old Farms was set on the side of a mountain between the towns of Avon and Farmington, Connecticut. The buildings were of stone, in old English style. As we approached the school, the first building was Dormitory One. It was the main entrance to the school itself, and upstairs were workshops, classrooms, and sleeping-quarters. You could walk right through this building and keep going straight across about fifty yards to Dormitory Three. A wide cement walk led from one building to the other. Halfway between and to the left was Dormitory Two; directly across from it, Dormitory Four. Another cement walk ran between Two and Four. Dormitory Three was a sort of focal point. You passed through it to the Red Cross, the swimming-pool, the Administration Building, the mess hall, and the outbuildings.

I had heard that all the trainees had private bedrooms, that each room held a radio, that there were weekly dances and nightly entertainment of one sort or another, that the ability of Old Farms grad-

uates was fantastic, that the emphasis was on independence and social intercourse, that Army red tape was at a minimum, that the trainees were as free to come and go as in their homes, and that canes and uniforms were taboo.

I'd heard, too, that the personnel were ogres, that no one paid any attention to anyone else, that you were left alone so much that you were lost half the time, that the scholastic assignments were difficult and the physical training laborious, that it was a prison, that it was a country club. And so on and on.

Most of us had learned Valley Forge and Phoenixville through Braille models, then through actual experience. Before going to Old Farms, I'd run my fingers time and again over Braille models of the buildings, but of course the proof would be in the pudding. There would be new friends and new instructors. Winter was coming on and that meant snow, snow that hid curbstones, that muffled sounds and equalized all terrain.

The busload of men was tense with excitement. I could feel it myself, flowing from the rest of them. Voices were keyed up, cigarette smoke was heavy.

At noon we stopped for lunch in the Connecticut countryside near New York. A Pfc. named Cook, one of the sighted escorts, briefed us before the stop, so we knew more or less what to expect. The hospital had wired ahead for reservations, but the other tables in the restaurant were crowded. When we filed in, the place became so quiet that the only sound was the shuffling of our feet. The awful quiet lasted forever, and then there came a loud burst of conversation. I don't know which was the worse. When I'd gone home, I'd noticed the same thing: the silence, then the loud embarrassed talk to cover it. We were stiff and clumsy in our efforts to be normal. Conversation was forced. Everyone ate quickly and quietly, and the relief was great when we boarded the bus once again.

I'd been through Hartford by train many times,

but didn't really know the city. What you see from a train is never indicative of a city's heart and soul. As we drove through on the bus, Cook, the Pfc, explained things to us. Hartford sounded like a pleasant place, with wide streets, large buildings, impressive insurance companies, and many trees.

As we approached Old Farms, no one spoke. There was a sort of frightened expectancy in the air. I got the weird impression that the busload of blind men was a little balloon not tied to anything, merely floating along on the wind until it should bump into something and halt.

In the Administration Building there was a burst of informal and friendly greeting. Nothing Army about it. There were many introductions, much handshaking, reunions among the Valley Forge old grads. Most of the Army regimentation was missing, and that brought home more clearly that in eighteen weeks we would be on our own—independent, job-seeking civilians.

I was assigned a cot in the gymnasium. This disappointed me, because I'd looked forward eagerly to the privacy of my own room, the first, except when on leaves, since 1943. The cots in the gym seemed to be all over the place. I banged my right leg against a bed every time I turned around, and by the end of the second day the upper break had become extremely painful.

Thanksgiving was quiet and lonely. We had a turkey dinner, but it only drove home the fact that I was blind, frightened, and alone, even surrounded by hundreds of people.

The next day I was transferred to a room of my own. It was quite small, with a radio, bunk, arm-chair, chest, closet, towel rack, and mirror. That's about all. The woodwork felt heavy to the touch and the floor planking seemed somewhat warped. The place had been an exclusive prep school for boys before the Army took over, and it was easy to imagine a small boy studying here in the little room. It smelt cool and a trifle musty. Sounds car-

ried easily in spite of the solid stone and heavy wood of the buildings.

Right after I transferred to my own room, I received a phone call. It was Jack Brandon, the sighted patient who had gone for the beer that night at Valley Forge. He'd been discharged and had gone home to Hartford. I arranged for a furlough and on Jack's invitation went to spend the weekend with him. It was a thrill for me simply to be with an old friend. We didn't do much; I met a few people, went out Saturday night for beer, slept late—but mostly we talked. About everything.

I asked Jack: "Well, how does it feel to be out?"

"Of the hospital? Great!"

"No, I meant out of the Army."

"Well, it's pretty good. At first, things aren't so big or important or attractive as you remember them, but after a while they go back to normal."

"At least for me things stay the same. If there's any change, I can't see it."

"Nothing had changed here, of course. Just me.

But I've got used to everything again, so it's O.K. now."

"What are you going to do about a job?"

"Don't laugh, Barry, but I'm going to join the police force."

"Well, I'll be darned. A good man to know. I wish you luck, Jack."

"Thanks."

"Say, Jack, seen any of the blind boys?"

"Not any I met at Valley Forge. But they're around town all the time. Most of the natives are used to you fellows."

"I guess they are by now. I hadn't thought of that."

"Certainly. Hartford's full of you. It's just like at Phoenixville, where you're no novelty."

"That'll make things easier."

"How do you like Old Farms, Barry? Disappointed?"

"So far, yes. But that's not giving the place much of a break. I've only been there five days."

“That’s what I meant about getting out. But you’ll get onto the ropes before long.”

“Yes, sure I will. It’ll take time, but that’s something I’ve plenty of.” I laughed. “Remember Foley? He was a great believer in time. ‘The healer of all things,’ he used to say.”

Monday morning, back at Old Farms, after my weekend at Jack’s, the door opened while I was dressing and a voice said: “Hi. I’m Ted Mallory, your orienter. I’m going to show you around for the next week or two.”

“Great! When do we start?”

“Right now. The first thing I’m going to do is take away your cane. You won’t need it when we’re through, so the sooner you get rid of it the better.”

“How about taking away my arm instead?”

Ted laughed and went on with his instructions. “You’re going to be living here in Dormitory Two for a while, so we’ll begin by learning how to get in and out of it and around the building itself.”

I liked Ted immediately. His voice was quick and forceful, with undertones of gentleness. He had a ready laugh and seemed enthusiastic about his work.

“I’ve been doing a little experimenting on my own,” I said. “So far I figure that my room is the third on the left when you come in the door by the telephone. I can get to the men’s washroom all right, and I know how the office is laid out. The only thing that really bothers me is getting downstairs. The door never seems to be in the same place twice.”

“Let’s start out for the mess hall,” Ted said. “I’ll show you how to reach the door and explain a few other things on the way.”

After we’d closed the door behind us leading into the office, Ted said: “Now stand with your back to the door. Next take a right oblique and walk about seven feet.”

I did as I was told and came in contact with the desk.

“Go to the right side of the desk and walk ahead a few feet.”

I came to a wall made of stone.

“Now,” Ted went on, “put your hand out to the right about a foot and a half and there’s the opening to the stairway. Incidentally, those stairs curve quite a bit and some of them are much wider than others. The walls are of rough stone and the steps are cement, so always take your time getting down. If you tripped, you could be badly hurt.”

I noticed that he didn’t touch me or try to guide me in any way. All he did was talk. Like flying blind, it was up to me, the pilot, to make a smooth landing.

When we arrived at the bottom of the stairs, Ted said: “If you put your hand out to the right, hip-high, you’ll find a Coke machine. Got it? Now take another right oblique and walk twelve feet.”

I followed his directions, found a door, and pulled it open. A blast of cold November air hit me in the face.

“Nice going,” Ted said. “That’s enough for now. I’m starved. How about you?”

“Let’s go.”

“You can hold my arm until we get to the mess hall, but you’ll have to get your own breakfast. You’ll understand how after we get there.”

Like a child praised by his mother, I was warm with pride over Ted’s words: “Nice going.” The cold air sharpened my appetite on the way. We walked to the center of the quadrangle and turned left to pass through Dormitory Three. En route, we passed several other trainees. Some walked quickly, laughing and joking; others went slowly. Men called out good-morning in loud cheerful voices. One man was scuffling along the walk. Ted said some of the new men did that to make certain they were still on the sidewalk. There were trees standing close to the edge of the walk, and the trainees were fearful of walking into them.

When we entered the mess hall, Ted at once let go of my arm. The room was filled with voices, the

clink of silver on china, and the rasping of chairs being moved.

“When you come through this door, Barry, take a left oblique and walk straight ahead until you come to the wall.”

I did so without difficulty.

“Next,” Ted went on, “walk along until you come to a counter. That’s where the trays are piled. Take one and go to the big wooden box. There are four compartments in it, for knife, fork, soup spoon, and teaspoon.”

As Ted spoke, I tried to follow his instructions.

“After the silverware, there’s a large wooden box that holds coffeecups. Keep going in the same direction and you’ll be served.”

I moved down the line, and a deep, cheerful voice said: “How many eggs and how do you want them, sergeant?”

A little farther on, another voice said: “Light or heavy on the fried potatoes?”

At the end of the service counter Ted had more

instructions. "Pick up your tray and walk right round the corner to the next counter."

There someone gave me a box of cereal and a bowl. Two bottles of milk were placed on my tray. Another voice asked: "How about some fruit juice?"

I shook my head, smiling. "Thanks, but I can hardly lift the tray as it is."

"This way," Ted said, "and someone will show you to your table."

I waited at the entrance to the mess hall for a moment. Then a new voice said: "O.K., soldier, let's go."

The new man led me past several tables. From the sounds, the mess hall was pretty crowded. Finally the man took the tray out of my hands and set it on the table. "Chair to your right," he said, and I heard him walk off.

Ted returned at once. "There's a pitcher of hot coffee on each table, Barry. There'll always be somebody with good enough eyesight to pour you

a cup. Don't hesitate to ask. The instructors, the detachment men, the trainees all eat here and one of them will always help you with anything."

After we'd eaten, Ted poured me another cup of coffee. I relaxed, lighting a cigarette. "This seems to be quite a place."

"It is," Ted answered enthusiastically, "but there's still no place like home. I get out of this man's Army in another month. I've had fifty-one months of it. That's a long time, especially for a married man." He blew a cloud of smoke. "You married, Barry?"

"Not now. I was before the war." I shook my head. "I made a rotten husband. I think I could do better now. I—hope I get the chance to prove it."

"You will," Ted said confidently. "They turn out men here, not chickens." He ground out his cigarette and sighed. "Well, back to business. Here's the schedule for this week. From the time we leave here, and for the rest of the week, I'm not going to

touch your arm and you're not to take mine. The entrance to Dormitory Two is the point we'll work from. I'll walk along with you from Dormitory Two to the other dormitories and back twice. Then you'll do it alone. When I say alone, I mean I won't even be beside you. I'll stay a few feet away and won't say anything until I see that you're hopelessly stuck. By Thursday you'll be fed to the teeth with walking back and forth from one building to another, but believe me, the repeats are necessary."

So we started. Day after day, hour after hour, back and forth. I ate, I slept, I began to recognize voices, and I walked back and forth, back and forth. By the end of the week I knew what Ted had meant. When he cheerfully suggested that I go over to the route again, I burst out: "For Pete's sake, why not concentrate on the longer trips? I could get around the quad in my sleep."

He didn't answer.

"Look," I pleaded, "I've been walking slowly on these practice trips. I'll bet I can get from here to

Dormitory Three and back again at a normal rate of speed without mishap. What do you say?"

"All right," Ted said skeptically. "Let's see you do it."

I braced my heels against the step of Dormitory Two and then plunged straight ahead. I could almost hear Carl Hamilton saying: "Take your time, Mac, take your time." I was so positive I could make it across that I could nearly see the path. I started out confidently and hadn't gone twenty feet when I crashed into a tree. It was a hard crack and it hurt. The rough bark of the tree cut the skin above my left eye, and blood ran down the side of my face. Anger washed over me and I began to tremble. Then disgust took over and, for the first time in months, fear. It's queer, but that one tiny setback knocked my self-confidence into a cocked hat. One moment I'd been sure of myself and the next I was as shaky and scared as a novice. I wiped the blood off my face with a handkerchief. Ted

spoke softly to me, but I don't know what he said. Finally he had to guide me back to my room.

Late that night I sat in my pajamas listening to the radio. It was the rebroadcast of a west-coast comedy hour. I'd spent the evening trying to talk myself out of the blues, but it wasn't easy to laugh yet. Suddenly, over the sound of the radio, I heard someone crying. I turned the volume lower and listened. The sobs were dry and harsh. They came from the next room.

I went into the hall and stood for a minute in front of the door, then knocked. "Kane? It's Barry. You all right?"

The crying stopped at once, but no one answered. I turned the knob and stepped inside. "Are you all right, Kane? Can I get somebody for you?"

His voice sounded thick. "Not you nor anyone else," he said. "Carol's dead, that's all. She died this morning."

“Who—who’s Carol?”

“My wife.”

“Kane!”

“Nobody can help me. Nobody. Except myself, blind Ralph Kane. Now beat it and leave me alone.”

“But you—I—I’m sorry, Ralph.”

The bed creaked as he rolled over. “Yeah, me too,” he said.

I stood there indecisively for another moment, but there was no sound from Kane. Quietly I felt my way out and closed the door.

Back in my own room, I thought about bumping into the tree that afternoon. I’d been sullen and unhappy ever since it happened. And all the while Ralph Kane’s wife had been lying dead.

I picked up the pillow and slammed it down on the bed. “Barry, you big, stupid fool. Poor, poor Kane.”

I lay down and put my arms over my head. The sobbing in the next room had begun again, and

with each sob the self-pity in me dissolved a little more and sympathy for someone else became a little stronger.

On the following Monday they gave me a general intelligence and aptitude test. Everyone at Old Farms had to take the test to determine his educational and vocational field.

Mr. Grayson, an adviser and counselor from the Veterans Administration, sent for me on Wednesday. His voice was warm and slow. Immediately I felt at home with him. "I've been studying the results of your test, Barry," he said. "They're good. You seem to have a tendency for social work. Have you ever done anything along those lines?"

I threw back my head and laughed. "Social work? I should say not." I thought about waiting on tables, my stevedoring days, the job as a counterman. "As a matter of fact, sir, I've never even worked in an office."

I knew he smiled when he said: "The results of these tests usually amaze the man who took them."

“Did you mean amuse instead of amaze?” I told him about the jobs I’d held, how we’d always needed more money and I’d had to drop out of school. We talked jobs for a long time. My record had certainly not been impressive up to that time, but Old Farms stood ready to take up my education where the public-school system had left off. Mr. Grayson explained first that they had rooms for mechanics and woodworkers, for basket-weaving, pottery-making, piano-tuning, and leatherworking. I remembered my old dream of making brooms in a blind man’s retreat. Emphatically I shook my head.

Finally Mr. Grayson said: “Your diction and grammar aren’t too bad. You seem to have a normal vocabulary and an aptitude for learning. Maybe you’d rather stick to the academic courses.”

I agreed immediately. “What can I take? Extra schooling would be perfect. Heaven knows I need it.”

When I left an hour later, I had in my hand a

complete schedule that was to start the following Monday.

The first thing on the daily program was listed as the gripe session. It lasted from eight thirty until nine o'clock. We met in the Red Cross Building, and after the lieutenant in charge had made a few announcements, he asked if there were any complaints. It was the first time since I'd been in the Army that anybody had asked an enlisted man whether or not things suited him. Two of the trainees had minor complaints; then the lieutenant said: "Men, there've been a few changes made over the weekend. The piano room is now on the lower left side of Dormitory Two."

A groan went up from the men.

The lieutenant continued: "Psychology class will be held in the lower left side of Dormitory Four and personnel-interviewing has been moved to—" His voice was drowned out by loud protests from almost everyone in the room.

A trainee with a high, Southern drawl yelled:

“Where’d they move the mess hall to? Hartford?”

The men roared, but it didn’t faze the lieutenant. “I don’t see why you should be concerned, Jones,” he said mildly. “You signed up for an English class two weeks ago and you haven’t shown up yet.”

“Lieutenant,” Jones drawled, “you can’t blame me for that. I haven’t been able to find the English class since I registered for it. Where are they holding it these days? On the roof?”

Blandly the lieutenant answered: “Same place as always, Jones. If you haven’t been able to find it in two weeks, I suggest you put in for an extension of time here at Old Farms. I hope you’ve been able to locate the latrine in two weeks?”

“Sure, sir,” said the Southerner, “but I needed the latrine a lot worse than I needed the English class.”

I thoroughly enjoyed the repartee. Self-assertion was one of the first things the Army deprived us of.

When the gripe session was finished, I had six classrooms to find. I had three classes of fifty minutes each, an hour for lunch, then three more fifty-minute sessions. There was a ten-minute break between classes. My first course was personnel-interviewing. After that came Braille, and then English and spelling classes, the two largest classes in the school. Public speaking, typing, and psychology completed the list of courses. I got lost after each session and was late for every one of them. The only place I found on time all day was the mess hall and that was easy; I just followed the crowd.

It wasn't until ten days later that I went from gripe session through to the evening meal without getting lost. That night I went into my room, stretched out on the bed, and turned on the radio. I lit a cigarette. Little by little my self-confidence had been seeping out of me at Old Farms. It had begun the day I hit my head on the tree, and since then the embarrassment of walking into the wrong

classroom, the ever present puzzle of where I was, the uncertainty of everything I did, had slowly drained more of it away.

That night I experienced a sense of triumph. It had been my first perfect day. It had taken a long time, but that in itself had taught me a lesson: that none of these little triumphs were easily come by. Each of them took time and patience, just as Foley had told me so long ago. Then, too, the temptation to give up peered over my shoulder all the time. It would have been so easy. A nice income for life (\$150 a month was the minimum amount for disability), a home of my own, and a man could dispense with initiative.

I wondered about those who gave up, what comfort they derived from life, and how it would feel to know that the gravy train had been won at the cost of their eyesight. They were clods, not men. Quitting was a one-way street.

The congenital blind were different. I didn't

know much about them. At least I'd seen the things the world had to offer. I'd seen the trees and animals. I'd seen cars and buildings. I'd seen the ocean at its stormiest and at its bluest. I remembered sunsets. I'd seen forests and slums and mountains and skyscrapers. I wondered what the congenital blind had in their minds when they thought of a streetcar or a rose. What was their idea of color? Then it struck me that perhaps I was losing my own conception of things, my idea of how they really looked. I squeezed my eyes shut and thought of the boys. There they were, Donny's impish, blue eyes and Junior's stubborn chin. I added a few pounds and inches, gave them a haircut, put neckties around their necks and baseball mitts on their hands and there they were, exactly as I knew them to be. I switched to objects: Main Street, my sister's house, City Hall, the railroad station, the restaurant where I'd worked in New York, the nightly ride over Williamsburg Bridge, the

Plaza on the Brooklyn side of the river—everything. It was all the same, as if I could still see if I would only open my eyes.

Strangely, though, I had as clear a picture of Old Farms and the men there as I did of the things I remembered. It seemed odd, but their voices and the way they walked gave me a clear mental picture of what they looked like. Perhaps my mental images were all wrong, but I didn't really care whether they were or not; they satisfied me entirely and all I needed was the sound of a voice to bring my mental picture into sharp focus.

Peace surrounded me like a fog that night. Many times I had thought I'd never again know tranquillity; now I realized I'd know it often if I didn't give up looking for it.

The instructors and teachers at Old Farms were the best in their fields. The courses were interesting and informative. In the public-speaking forums they even took a mike out to the center of the

quadrangle, and the members of the class took turns acting as inquiring reporters. Personnel-interviewing was rather complicated, but typing proved a pleasure and I improved steadily. Braille was still tedious. The class that I looked forward to most was the last one of the day: psychology. There were about twenty in the class, and we argued over the subject matter continually. More than once we were late for the evening meal. The arguments generally began over something related to the course, then degenerated into verbal free-for-alls over entirely different matters.

One night after class a group of us sat around arguing about a third World War.

“They can count me out,” said one trainee. “I get the creeps when I think of this one.”

“I don’t want any part of another one, either,” I said, “but they’ll probably come up with a way to use us.”

A third man spoke up. “Go ahead and joke

about it if you want, but the next war will see the end of all of us; the blind, the crippled, young and old, the brilliant and the stupid.”

I said: “Yeah? And us with the atom bomb? What country would dare take a chance that we wouldn’t use it?”

“Don’t be foolish, Barry. You don’t suppose the scientists from other countries are in a state of suspended animation, do you? Someone else will come up with an atom bomb before long or I miss my guess.”

The first trainee said: “Sure, it’s our secret now, but too many people know about it for it to stay that way.”

“At least we’ve never lost a war,” I said, “and my money says we never will.”

“There’s a lot more to winning a war than simply having the other fellow lie down and say: ‘I surrender, dear.’ ”

Suddenly one of the men laughed. “We’d be a big help in the next one, wouldn’t we?”

I quoted, mockingly: “‘A blind man is considered well adjusted if he can blow his nose without help and can refrain from suicidal tendencies in public.’”

“There’ll be something we can do. There’ll be something for everybody to do.”

“Whatever it is,” I said, “I’ll do it for the boys’ sake. Did you hear the verse called ‘To Our Offspring’?”

“No. What is it?”

I quoted:

“Take warning, my son, should you aspire  
To march into battle as did your sire:  
You might win the combat hero’s prize  
Of a plastic pair of G.I. eyes.”

There was a silence; then someone muttered:  
“Horrible!”

Finally another man spoke up. “I’m a step ahead of all of you,” he said. “If there’s another war, I have a sure-fire plan for getting out of it.”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“Easy,” said the first G.I. “I’m going to get a seeing-eye dog with flat feet.”

The next Monday at gripe session the lieutenant read us an article on facial vision—the ability to sense or feel that there is something in front of you. I didn’t believe in it then and I don’t now, but some of the men swear by it. I heard someone say that facial vision is only the cessation of air currents. That theory I could swallow. The face and hands, when you’re dressed in everyday clothing, are the only parts of the body that are exposed. Naturally, a change in air currents would be more noticeable on the skin of the face. It would depend, too, on the height of the obstruction. A low fence, for example, wouldn’t change the air currents in front of the face. More than one trainee fell over low objects, but, because of the change of the air on their faces, could avoid higher obstructions. Sensitivity to the change was more prevalent in some men than in others. Personally, I was rarely conscious of it.

Away from the school, people often asked me about the development of my four remaining senses. I can't honestly say that there was much change in them other than the fact that I became more aware of them. I smoke more heavily than before, but that's more from boredom than anything else. When I want something to do, I can't pick up a magazine or go to a show, so I smoke. Actually, my hearing is worse. During combat an exploding shell had ruptured an eardrum. Sighted people seem to think my senses are keener simply because I'm forced to pay more attention to them. They are no sharper; they are used more often. It's like anything else; you forget you have a stomach until you are made aware of it by a stomachache.

During my stay at Old Farms I had made friends with a Midwesterner named Pete Barron. He was rather an odd person, quiet and shy; but he was pleasant and seemed lonelier than the rest of us, so we spent a good deal of time in his com-

pany. Pete had been at Old Farms longer than I and he suffered moods of depression and the utmost unhappiness. Each time something happened to upset him, Pete would go to his room and stay there for days. He was comatose, too; he would fall into a coma-like sleep any time, anywhere. Pete would seem alert, enjoying himself one moment, then slip rapidly into a trancelike lethargy. I don't think he knew when a spell was approaching or how to prevent one. We always decided against rousing him, because none of us knew the medical history of Pete's strange condition. We were afraid that waking him might prove harmful.

One night after supper I lay on my bed listening to the radio when Pete knocked on the door and came in.

"Just taking it easy, huh, Barry? Thought I'd come in and sit for a while. Here, I've brought you a Coke."

Pete didn't come calling very often. I figured he had a good reason, so I waited.

We drank our Cokes in silence; then he said: "Barry, I can't figure you. Don't you ever blow your stack or get down in the dumps?"

"Sure," I said, "plenty of times. But I've got a system. When things get rough and I feel like blowing my top, I grab a couple of Cokes, come up here, and turn on the radio. After a while I forget what I was mad at in the first place. Some times it takes longer than others, but eventually, it works every time."

"Maybe for you," Pete said gloomily, "but it wouldn't do me any good. My problems aren't here, they're at home." He began to speak slowly and carefully. "It's my wife, Barry. I can't figure her out since I've been here."

"Why come to me, Pete? What I don't know about women, you could make a book of."

"You've always been—oh, I don't know—easy with me and patient. I just sort of thought you'd listen without laughing at me and maybe help me figure things out. I've wanted to talk to someone

for a long time, but you know how it is.”

Quietly I said: “Sure, Pete, go ahead if it’ll make you feel better.”

I heard him put his Coke bottle down on the chest; then he began. The words poured out of him. “When I first came to Valley Forge Hospital, I sent a letter to my folks and one to my wife. I told them where I was and asked them to get together and come to see me. My folks went over to my wife’s and she told them that she’d rather see me alone and for them to come without her. She said she’d come to see me the next week. My folks weren’t at all pleased and they’ve been more or less on the outs with my wife ever since.” He rose and walked a couple of steps toward me. “She didn’t visit me the next week or all the time I was in the hospital. She didn’t even write to me, for that matter. When my furlough came up, I refused it and took a weekend pass instead. I wanted to find out where I stood with her before I went home. I didn’t know what was on her mind. I was

all mixed up. If she'd written or come to me and told me that she didn't like the idea of living with a blind man, I wouldn't have blamed her so much. But she didn't do anything. That's what almost killed me."

Fleetinglly I thought of Ralph Kane. What do you say to someone whose heart is broken?

Pete went on: "Dad met me at the train. He said he'd had a note from my wife that morning saying she was going out of the state to visit relatives for a couple of weeks. As far as I could see, she was through with me, but good. I didn't go out of the house during the weekend and was mighty relieved to get back to the hospital."

He paused for a moment. It was so quiet that I could hear him breathing. Then he said: "Anyway, I came down here. My time was up, but they gave me an extension. I'm going to ask for another one. I dread going home, Barry. I can't do it. Besides, there's something funny going on."

"Why? What else has happened?"

“After I got here, she started to write me the darndest letters—‘I’m getting over a cold, how are you? Things are the same here, I saw your father on the street the other day’—and she signs them ‘sincerely yours.’ I haven’t written to her because, so help me, I don’t know what to say to her. It’s like writing to someone I don’t even know. Then yesterday a letter came almost the same as the others, but get this: she wrote: ‘P.S. I still love you.’ My Lord, Barry, she has a funny way of showing it. I don’t know what to do.” He finished almost in tears.

I rolled over on my back. “Pete, do you remember at Valley Forge how a psychiatrist used to examine each new patient? Then, if he thought the man needed help, he’d come and sit by the bed and talk?”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“There was one patient in the ward who wouldn’t let his wife come near him. She hung

around and called up and wrote. She even took a job in Phoenixville to be with him. The psychiatrist used to come in and sit by that man's bed by the hour, just talking to him. I listened. You know what he said?"

Pete was curious. "No. What?"

"He talked about adjustment. He talked about accepting the inevitable and getting accustomed to what had to be. He talked about learning to live with things the way they are. What I'm driving at is that the situation with your wife might be the same thing in reverse."

"I don't get it."

"It's kind of hard to put into words, but the thing is that all people don't react the same way to any situation. At Valley Forge I heard lots of wives. Some of them cried, some were controlled, some were hysterical, some were possessive, some were repulsed—anyway, they were all different. The men, most of them, took it in their stride, or were

learning to. But to get back to you and your wife. It was a terrible shock to you when you found out you had been blinded, wasn't it?"

"Of course. It was to all of us."

"And it took a long, long time for you to admit to yourself that it would last forever. Right?"

"Sure. But what are you driving at?"

"This," I said. "I figure that it must have been an awful shock to her, too. And she hasn't adjusted to it yet. Catch on?"

"Well, I'll be—"

"Don't you get it? She's the one who's hurt and confused. She can't believe what's happened to her marriage. She doesn't know a thing about blindness, so she's probably scared to death. Why, think of the time it's taking us to learn to live with sighted people. Reverse it and think of the time it's going to take them to learn to live with us. Don't forget, it's her home, her husband, and her future that are involved." I reached for a cigarette.

“Maybe I’m all wrong, Pete, but it’s worth a try, isn’t it?”

There was wonderment in Pete’s voice. “I’m the one who’s blind, and my wife has to get used to it. I never thought of that.”

I hadn’t either until Pete brought the matter up.

Then his voice changed. “But why should a thing like that happen only to us? Most of the men’s wives stuck by them through the whole thing.”

“What makes you think you’re the only one? Lots of the men have domestic trouble, only we don’t happen to hear much about it. Do you know what I think, Pete?” I asked eagerly. “I think that ‘P.S. I love you,’ business means she’s getting over the shock and is asking you to forgive her for the way she’s acted. I’ll bet it’s her way of asking you to write. Go ahead. Give her a chance to explain.”

“Well, Barry,” Pete said, “you’ve given me a lot to think about. Thanks.” He rose and opened the

door. "I'll be seeing you." The door shut softly behind him.

I'll be seeing you. That was a laugh. Pete would never see me and I'd never see him. He'd never see that wife of his again either. The words floated around the room and came to a stop directly in front of my eyes. They were in red letters three feet high. "I'll be seeing you." I'd never see anything again, anything at all.

## CHAPTER NINE

**I**N THE middle of December everybody was given a thirty-day pass. A few of the men from the Midwest or the west coast had to stay at the school, but I headed for home with an attendant. The attendant hadn't been my own idea, though he did make things easier. A few days before we were to leave, one of the detachment men had come to me and introduced himself as Tommy Villa, from Boston.

“Look, Barry,” he pleaded, “if you request an attendant to escort you home and name me as the one, then I get to spend the whole thirty days with my family.”

“I guess so,” I said. “It sounds all right to me.”

“It's like this. One of my brothers is back from

overseas for his discharge. My other brother wrote Mom from where he's stationed in the South and said he'd be home for Christmas. So if I go too, the whole family will be together for the first time since before the war. How about it?" ✓

"Sure, Tommy. I'll put in the request right now."

A few days later, when it came time to leave, I finished packing and sat down on the bed to wait for Tommy. As I sat there, Pete Barron stuck his head in the door and said: "Are you there, Barry? I'm headed for home again. See you after the holidays."

He had gone before I could answer.

As train time approached, I grew more and more nervous. At last Villa showed up, breathless. "I had to wait until they'd completed the papers," he puffed. "Are you all set?"

"Gosh, yes. I've been ready for an hour. Come on."

We made a dash for the bus. It was jammed with trainees going home for Christmas and there

was a great deal of excitement. Some of the men sang, others swore, most of them boasted about the women they were planning to overwhelm. We shouted and jostled like a gang of schoolboys.

We arrived at the station in Hartford just as the train pulled in. The first time I'd gone home, I'd been conscious of the people around me: of their embarrassment and nervous spurts of conversation. None of this was evident now, probably because Tommy and I were in such a rush to make the train. Whatever the reason, it made the trip more pleasant. I didn't feel like a freak, but like just another traveler.

After we had found seats, Tommy excused himself. I relaxed and lit a cigarette. The people around me were talking, but I didn't pay much attention until someone behind me said in a loud voice: "We'll be in New York in a little over two hours and then we have a two-hour stopover. We can get dinner there before we catch the train west."

I turned around fast. "Did you say we'd be in New York in a couple of hours?"

"That's right, sergeant."

"What train is this?"

"Boston to New York."

"Thanks." Well, this was a good one. Villa, my sighted escort, had assisted me to a seat on a train going in the opposite direction from Boston. The more I thought about it, the funnier it seemed.

When Tommy came back, I needled him. "Well, Tommy, how long do you think it will take to get to Boston?"

He fairly burst with enthusiasm. "About two hours, and you'll be home an hour after that. Brother! Home for thirty whole days. Hot dog!"

I said: "Want to make a little bet to pass the time away?"

"Sure. What's the bet?"

"I'll bet you half a dollar this train won't get to Boston in six hours, let alone two."

"Tell it to the Marines," he laughed. "I've a time-

table right here in my hands and I'm reading it right now. It's like taking candy from a baby, but it's a bet."

"O.K., it's a bet. Now I have news for you."

"Let's have it," Villa said smugly.

"Mister, we're on the wrong train."

Villa sat up. "Wrong train? You're cracked. We can't be. What makes you think so?" He turned to squint out the window. "Wrong train?" he said again weakly.

"Ask the man in back of us. Go ahead."

I could hear him turning around. "Hey, mister, does this train go to Boston?"

"Oh, no," the man said. "It just came from there. This is the New York train."

"Oh, my gosh," Tommy mourned. "I was in such a hurry that I forgot to check the board." He sounded as if he were about to burst into tears.

"Oh, gosh, I'm sorry, Barry."

"Forget it," I said. "It was worth the laugh. Besides, we've thirty days to get there."

“Yes, but now we have to get off somewhere and go all the way back again. What a waste of time!”

“Forget it,” I said again, “but don’t forget my half dollar.”

“What?”

“My fifty cents. I’ll take it now.”

“It’s a steal, but here.” He fished in his pocket and put the money in my hand. “How did you find out this was the wrong train?” he asked curiously.

“Easy. I heard the fellow behind us tell the man he’s with that they’d soon be in New York. The moral of this story is never to bet with a trainee unless you’re positive of your grounds.” I lit another cigarette. “Look, nothing has passed us going in the opposite direction. That means the Boston train hasn’t gone through yet. Let’s get off at the next stop and catch it.”

“Good idea. Only this time I’ll take *your* arm and follow you until we get to Boston.”

. . .

A few days after getting home, a buddy of mine, Bill Wallace, and I went out for lunch. We ate in a place with booths, and after Bill had guided me to a seat, he sat down opposite me. After lunch and a final smoke I heard Bill slide out of his side of the booth, so I stood up to wait for him. When footsteps passed by, I reached out and took the arm of the person who was walking past. I sauntered all the way to the door before I wondered what Bill was doing wearing a fur coat. As my unknown escort and I reached the door, I heard Bill's voice back in the restaurant say: "Where in the world is he going?"

I dropped the arm I held and waited sheepishly for Bill. The poor woman who had escorted me to the door scurried out. She's probably still wondering what happened.

The holidays at home were wonderful. Day-by-day living went forward smoothly. I seemed to fit into the family routine with little or no embarrassment.

Christmas meant more to me than ever before. Where it used to mean brilliance and shine, it now meant the sound of excited voices, the snapping of the fire, the reverence and exultation of carol-singing on the radio, the clean odor of pine, and the tantalizing odor of turkey. It meant the crackling of packages being unwrapped and the sudden ringing of the doorbell as friends dropped in. The impressions were clear and sharp, not muddled into a whole as they used to be.

In spite of this, I felt happy at getting back to Old Farms. I fell into the old familiar niche readily and willingly. I'd no sooner unpacked than the door opened and one of the men breezed in.

“Hiya, Barry? How did the vacation go?”

“Great, Colley, but it's good to be back. How is it with you?”

“Not bad, not bad at all. There were a couple of little things. I met an old girl friend of mine and went out on a couple of dates. But that was quite enough. In fact, it was too much.”

“How come?”

“The more I explained how she should walk along with me,” Colley said, “the less she seemed to understand. No kidding, Barry, she walked me into everything in town. A week with her and I’d be walking on my heels. Hey, have you heard the news about Pete Barron?”

“Haven’t heard a thing. What’s happened to him?”

“Well, he left the same day we all did, but I just found out that he spent the holidays right here at the school. He came back two days after he left.”

“Gosh, Colley, I wonder what’s up.”

“I don’t know. There’s something funny about that guy, anyway. Something about his wife. I don’t know what it is.”

“Mmm, so I’ve heard.”

Colley and I swapped vacation stories for a while and then he left to circulate among the other men. When he’d gone, I thought about Pete Bar-

ron. His wife must have left him again or he wouldn't have come back to school. I guessed that Pete would be in one of his worst moods.

That night at the Red Cross, Pete drew me aside and told me what had happened. His voice sounded tight and strained.

"She got word that I was coming home," he said, "because two days before I got there, she left again." For a minute he sat listening to the music and the scuffling of the dancers, then he said loudly: "I guess that washes up my marriage." The tempo of the music increased and Pete stood up. "I have this dance. See you later."

The next day Pete went into one of his solitary-confinement sessions that lasted the entire week. Colley and I went to visit him twice and tried to get him to join us at the Red Cross dances, but he made it very clear that he wanted to be left alone.

I studied hard that week, and within a few days Mr. Grayson called me into his office. "Well, Barry," he began, "I've been following your train-

ing with a good deal of interest. Your instructors' reports have all been good and they say that you show an unusual amount of interest in every subject. How would you feel about a little practical training for a change?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Grayson?"

"I mean a little factory training—about six weeks of it. We can place you in one of the factories in this area, so you'll get not only the practical experience, but a nice week's pay to boot. Aren't there a lot of factories in your home city?"

"Yes, sir. Most of the factories back home are shoe factories, but one of the trainees who works around here told me none of the men from here are employed by shoe concerns, so any experience I can get around here won't do me any good when I get home. Another thing, Mr. Grayson, my academic courses are only half finished. Why drop them now?" The vision of blind men turning out brooms on a production line loomed up in front of me. A shoe factory would be almost the same.

Stubbornly I said: "I want to keep on the way I'm going."

Mr. Grayson wasn't surprised. "I thought you might feel that way; but the type of work, the type of courses you're taking, point more or less toward office work, which in turn might involve so-called field duty. You know, you're restricted in the amount and type of field duty you can manage. It might prove to be a big obstacle in getting a job. And, of course, there's always the unpleasant possibility that after all your training you may not be able to get an office job at all."

I stood up. "Look, sir, I'm not going to worry about that now. I never had a good education. I never had the opportunity before to benefit myself academically. I like the courses I'm taking, and if I can't get a job when I get home, if the amount of training I get here isn't enough, I can always go back to school under the G.I. bill, can't I?"

"Yes, you can," Mr. Grayson said. He pushed back his chair. "You certainly know what you want

to do, Barry. You'll make out all right. By the way, I'm getting a letter off to the Boston office of the Veterans Administration about you. I hope to have some good news for you in a week or so." He took my hand in his. "Good luck until I see you again, sergeant."

As I shut the door of Mr. Grayson's office, I heard Pete Barron's voice down the hall. I called out: "Hey, Pete!" but he didn't stop. He just called back: "I'll see you later, Barry."

I went back to my room and changed into a sweater, then walked over to the workshop. I'd spent two months of my spare time working on a woman's pocketbook. It was a beautiful thing, made of the finest leather the school could provide. It felt cool and smooth and the leather smelled new. Working on it had been as satisfactory a blues-chaser as my Coke-and-radio method. I put the finishing details on it and started back to my room with the bag in my hand.

A woman stopped me in the corridor. In a sim-

pering, high-pitched voice that was strange to me she asked me who I was and how I felt. Finally she said: "My, that's a beautiful pocketbook. Did you make it?"

"Yes, ma'am," I answered.

"My goodness," she shrilled, "it's really a beautiful piece of work. I wonder now, would you consider selling it?"

"I only made it for the fun of it," I said.

"Well, you dear boy, I'd simply adore to have it. Any woman would. I'll give you eighty dollars for it."

I'd spent a long, arduous time making the pocketbook and had come to think of it with affection. Even though she was offering a ridiculously high price for it, I clutched it to my chest as if she were going to snatch it and run.

"I'm sorry, but I'd rather not sell it. Some of the other boys have made beautiful things that can be bought any time. Why don't you look around and then make up your mind?"

“No, indeed,” she said archly. “That’s the very one I want. Isn’t eighty dollars enough?”

“Yes, ma’am, it’s more than enough. I’m sorry, it’s just not for sale.”

She bickered for a moment or two longer, then abruptly changed the subject. “You know, the girls at the club were wondering—” She paused. “You don’t mind if I ask you one teensy personal question, do you?”

I wondered what was coming. “No, ma’am.”

“Well, it’s just this. The girls at the club were wondering how you dear boys were able to shave.”

So that was it. I’d met this one before and we had a stock reply. “Shave?” I said. “Why, it’s very simple.”

“Really? How *do* you manage it?”

Gravely I said: “Why ma’am, we use a Braille mirror.”

“Oh!” she said, “of course. I just knew there was an explanation.”

Excitedly she called good-by and dashed off, doubtless on her way to the club girls.

I stood where I was and laughed out loud. Then, still carrying the pocketbook, I went on to my room.

A few days later I looked up Mr. Grayson. He'd been ill and I hadn't seen him since he had mentioned the letter from the Veterans Administration. I asked him about it. "The last time I saw you, you mentioned writing a letter to the V.A. in Boston. Could you tell me what it's all about?"

"Certainly. Here's the story. The V.A. in Boston recently placed a former trainee of Old Farms at work in the Boston office. I wondered if it meant an opening wedge for other trainees, so I wrote and inquired about it and mentioned you at the same time. The man to whom I wrote is the one who placed the first trainee and I've just received his answer. He tells me that if you complete your schooling here satisfactorily, he'll be glad to

arrange to interview you about taking a Civil Service examination. He doesn't say whether or not there is an opening waiting for you, but I think we can regard the letter as an optimistic one. How about you? How do you feel about it?"

I thought over what he'd told me. It was almost an offer of a job, my very first. Me with a job; no eyes, but a job. It was something to think about. "Great," I said at last. "It's a big step in the right direction. I'm certainly glad now that I stuck to the academic courses. They should be a tremendous help in taking the exam."

"Let's hope so, sergeant." He rose and shook my hand. "Good luck, boy. Knuckle down to those books."

I returned the handshake with pressure. Here was a fine person who'd taken on an extra job for my sake. "Thanks, Mr. Grayson," I said, "thanks very much."

A few nights later I stood chatting with one of

the hostesses at the Red Cross when I heard Pete Barron call out my name. I made my way over to him and asked what he wanted.

“Let’s go outside, quick,” he said. His hand shook on my arm.

Outside the door I said: “What’s up, Pete?”

“She’s here, Barry, she’s here. I just got a call. My wife is here.”

“Your wife? She’s in Hartford?”

“Hartford! She’s right out there in Dormitory One. The CQ just called me. She’s waiting for me right now.” He swallowed loudly. “Come with me, Barry. You’ve got to. I don’t know what she wants.” He gripped my arm in both hands. “I’m afraid to go and meet her.”

“Gosh, Pete, I should think you’d want to meet her by yourself,” I said uncomfortably.

“I’m scared to, Barry. Please come with me—at least until I find out what’s on her mind.”

I shrugged. “O.K., Pete, if that’s the way you want it.”

We walked through Dormitory Three, and as we neared Dormitory One, Barron said: "She must be right inside that door, Barry. Wish me luck."

I heard a choked sob and then a girl's voice. "I'm right here, darling," she said, "and no one will ever have to wish you luck again." She was crying and I could sense that she had thrown her arms around Pete.

"You—you called me darling," Pete said wonderingly.

"Yes, darling, yes. I've been a stupid child. I think I've been a little out of my mind these past few months. I couldn't make myself believe that you were blind. I couldn't picture you that way. I was afraid to meet you. Not afraid of you, darling," she hurried on, "but afraid of myself. I don't know if I can make you understand what I'm trying to say. One thing I do know; I love you, darling. I need you. Forgive me for what I've done to you. I love you. Please, Pete—"

I edged out through the doorway and stood for a

few minutes in the dark. Maybe the moon was out. I couldn't hear Pete and Helen any more, but I could hear the beating of my own heart. To have a woman love a man like that, a blind man. I'd pushed the thoughts of marriage and sex and woman-love so far back in my head that they hadn't popped out in months. Pete and Helen brought them to me in a flood. Funny, I had friends, a family, maybe even a job, but I felt intensely lonely after I'd left those two. With an effort I started across the quad to the Red Cross Building. Apparently my mind was still on other things, for the first thing I knew, I was lost. I hadn't been lost in a long time. I could hear voices near by, but I was darned if I was going to admit to anyone after all this time that I didn't know where I was. The walk I stood on led to one of the other dormitories. I had an idea. I stuck my head in the door and called out innocently: "Is Fred Hutchins in there? Any of you fellows seen him?"

"Hi, Barry." One of the detachment men recog-

nized me. "This is Dorm Four. Hutchins lives in Two."

"I know he lives in Two," I said indignantly, "but I thought he might be over here."

Another voice said: "I think he's over at the Red Cross."

"Thanks a lot, fellows," I said, opening the door. "Think I'll take a run over there."

About an hour later Barron and his wife came over to the Red Cross Building. When Pete introduced her to me, Helen said: "Pete's told me you know all about it, Sergeant Barry." She hesitated, then continued in a low, timid voice: "I suddenly realized how lonely I was and that I wanted to be with Pete. It took a little time to get up enough courage to come."

"That's not all," Pete said proudly. "She's going to stay. Tomorrow we're going apartment-hunting."

"Yes, Pete," Helen said, turning away from me. "We've been separated too long as it is."

I said good-night to them and added: "I think it's great, you two."

Back in the room, I remembered a remark by one of the men whose face had been mutilated. He said that he felt like a prisoner, because no woman wanted to look at a face like his, let alone live with it. I knew what he meant, although I hadn't had that feeling for a long time. But that night, as I lay in bed, some of the "unwanted" feeling came back and slept with me.

## CHAPTER TEN

ONE NIGHT, a little before I left Old Farms for good, a group of us were invited to a dinner party. When the time came to leave for the party, the hospital station wagon picked us up. We all climbed in and were driven toward our hostesses' home in Hartford. After being introduced to the other guests, friends of the people who gave the party, and as the uncertainty of the new place wore off, a girl came up and asked if she could be my partner for the evening. "I'm really very nice," she said, "and I'm much prettier than the other girls."

"She's much fatter, too," one of the hostesses chimed in.

Everybody laughed, but I figured I couldn't see her anyway. "Sure," I said, "I don't think you're fat at all. And you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen."

She giggled and put her hand on my arm. "We'd better go into the house, then," she said. "Dinner is almost ready."

We walked about ten yards; then she stopped and I heard a click. Some sort of gate, I guessed.

"Be careful now," the girl said. "There are four steps in front of us."

I raised my left leg and stepped forward. The next thing I knew, I was hurtling through space and falling downward. Instinctively I hung on to the girl's arm. In a matter of seconds my nose buried itself in the ground. There was a crash and a loud "Ouch!" as the girl landed beside me. I lay there feeling like a fool.

Somebody giggled. Footsteps came from the direction of the house and a woman said: "Oh, you poor man! Did you fall down?"

I refrained from asking her what she thought I was doing lying there with my nose buried in the dirt. “No, ma’am,” I said. “Think nothing of it. I always throw myself down the stairs.”

“Oh, I’m awfully sorry,” my partner said. “I should have known enough to tell you the steps led downward.”

I stood up and brushed off my trousers. “Forget it,” I said. “How about you? Are you hurt?”

“Not where it shows. But my dress is ruined. I’ll have to go home and change.” She laughed ruefully. “I’m glad you can’t see me. I’m a mess. Will you be all right until I get back?”

“Sure,” I said, “but if you don’t see me around the grounds, look down the well. I might be there.”

The girl laughed and took my arm. “Come on. The least I can do is leave you in a safe place.” She escorted me inside, said good-by, and left.

It wasn’t the first time—nor the last—that something funny happened to me. There’s embarrassment along with such episodes, but they are funny

just the same. I've fallen down, I've spoken to strangers, I've walked into wrong buildings, I've got lost.

One time, with a sighted companion, I went into a restaurant for breakfast. The waitress put menus in front of us and then went away. My buddy read me the menu and I selected what I wanted for breakfast. He excused himself afterward, and while he was gone the waitress came to take our orders.

"Give me tomato juice," I said, "with sausages, toast, and coffee."

I was smoking at the time. As she read the order back to me, I flicked an ash off my cigarette and then proceeded to grind it out in the sugarbowl.

I've been back to that restaurant many times since then. The waitress tells me that on the first occasion her impulse was either to hit me over the head with a plate or to call the police. Every time I go back she says: "If you're going to smoke, Barry, wait a minute and I'll get you a sugarbowl."

I don't mind these things very much. Probably

not so much as I should. In fact, I get a kick out of repeating them to anyone who'll listen.

Incidentally, the proper technique of falling down is one of the things we were never taught at Avon, though I've heard that other schools for the blind include it in their curricula. They did, however, teach us how to distinguish certain voices. Recordings of the voices of certain individuals were played to us time and again; then two or three of the voices were put on a single recording, then three or four, and so on, until we were able to distinguish many voices at a time. The method held me in good stead at the school, but it didn't do me much good when I walked down the street at home and someone across the street hollered: "Hi, Barry! It's me."

I'd hate it, though, if the "Hi, Barry's" ever stopped.

A warm and pleasant spring descended on Old Farms. One particularly lazy afternoon Clyde,

Colley, and I stood near the main entrance to the school just chewing the fat. Suddenly Colley said in his usual exuberant fashion: "Hey, let's hitch a ride from the first car leaving the grounds and go to the Elm Tree Inn and see what's doing."

The three of us had been to the Elm Tree Inn before. Clyde said: "Sure," and I said that it was O.K. with me.

We flagged down each car as it approached from the school grounds, but in half an hour only three cars had come out, one filled to capacity, and the other two going in the opposite direction.

Clyde got impatient. "Listen, fellows, let's walk to Farmington. I feel like doing something different today. How about it?"

"Count me in," Colley said, grinning.

"Sure," I said, "I'll go along."

Colley and I had no sight at all and Clyde had so little as to be almost negligible on a venture of this nature.

The downward slope of the road toward the soft

shoulder allowed us to follow it quite easily. We kept to the right, walking along the edge of the soft shoulder. For about half a mile no cars passed. I remembered that there was a fork in the road about half a mile ahead and was wondering how we'd cross it, when we heard a car come by and we stopped.

“Watch me flag this car down,” Colley bragged.

I laughed at him. “How do you know whether there's one person in it or six?”

“I don't know. And I don't care,” Colley said. “I'm flagging them all.”

The quietness of the motor told me that it must be a fairly late-model car, in good condition. It came to a stop a few feet in front of us and a man's cheerful voice said: “Hop in, fellows. I'm going right into the center of Hartford.”

I heard a click and wondered if the door had been opened. Colley must have heard it too, because he asked: “Is that door open?”

“Why, yes. My little boy just opened it.” There

was a moment's hesitation and then the man's voice went on: "Did you ask if it was open?"

"We sure did," Colley replied. "An open door is awful easy to walk into."

"Well," the man said, "it's wide open. It's right in front of you."

"I'm afraid, sir, that I can't see it," Colley answered. "In fact, none of us can see it."

I found the door in the meantime and got in. Clyde and Colley followed.

The driver said in a puzzled voice: "Look, fellows, I don't get this. Do you mean to say that—" He hesitated, and then broke out with: "Oh, gosh, I get it now. You're from Old Farms, the school for blinded veterans down the road a little way."

Colley laughed. "I guess it is a little confusing at first."

The man laughed with him. "You sure had me coming and going. For a while there I couldn't figure out whether you were all drunk or crazy. My name is Harold Foster." He turned to the

woman beside him. "This is my wife, Helen, and my little boy."

I introduced myself and then Colley and Clyde.

Mrs. Foster turned around to the back seat and said in a soft voice: "I'm so happy to have a chance to meet some of you boys. We've heard a lot about the school and the wonderful work they're doing there."

"It's a great place," Colley agreed.

All of a sudden the little boy asked, excitedly: "Is you soldiers all blind? You can't see me?"

His mother grabbed him quickly. "Hush, son, you mustn't ask questions like that."

"Please don't think we mind it, Mrs. Foster," I said hastily. "We don't. It's only natural for him to be curious about us."

The boy was determined to get an answer to his question. "Why is all you soldiers blind?"

His mother gasped and I decided to try something I'd wondered about.

"Please," I said, "don't scold him. Honestly, we

don't mind. If it's all right with you, I'd like to explain it to him."

The boy was oblivious of his mother. "You didn't tell me why you can't see me," he demanded.

Mrs. Foster didn't say anything, so I went on. I said to the boy: "Did anyone ever tell you that there was a big war a little while ago?"

"Sure," he said enthusiastically. "I seed a whole bunch of soldiers go by. They could see."

"Yes, they could. And so could we at one time. You see, there were some people from another country and they wanted to hurt this country, because we didn't have the same ideas as they did. We couldn't let them hurt the nice people here, especially all the little kids that you know and play with, could we?"

"Why'd they want to hurt us? We didn't do nothing to them."

"I wish I could answer that one for you, but I'm afraid I can't. Anyway, before they could come

over here and hurt us, we went over there and fought them. In a war some fellows are hurt, and that's what happened to us. We had our eyes hurt."

"Oh," the boy answered excitedly, "you was the good guys and licked all the bad guys, huh?"

Everyone laughed at that, but I said, quite seriously: "That's about the size of it."

The boy seemed satisfied at last and promptly switched the subject by saying: "Can you play golf? My daddy is the champion, aren't you, Daddy?"

"Not quite," his father said, laughing, and began to ask questions about the school. He and his wife didn't seem to know a thing about it and were filled with questions about the methods of training, how we learned to get around, and what it was like to be on our own again.

When we arrived at the Elm Tree Inn, both Mr. and Mrs. Foster insisted on coming in with us.

Once inside, the little boy strayed off like a

puppy to snoop around. Mr. and Mrs. Foster, Clyde, Colley, and I settled down, each with a glass of beer.

“Did I ever tell you about the night I went A.W.O.L. and got picked up for it?” I said.

Colley sounded as if he were grinning. “Only one?” he asked.

“The time I am referring to,” I said with dignity, “I took off from camp without a pass. It was before I went overseas. The idea was to go through a field near by and hit the main road to home. I got across the field all right, but got fouled up in the dark and lost in some woods. By the time I hit the main road, I was all dirty and scratched and the idea of going A.W.O.L. didn’t look so attractive.”

“What happened?” Mrs. Foster asked.

“Well, I pasted my best private-on-leave smile on my face and waited for somebody to pick me up. The first car to come along stopped and the door opened. It happened to be driven by an M.P. who said: ‘Get in.’ I got in. Then I told him: ‘I’m

only going a little way. Maybe I shouldn't bother you.' 'Let's see your pass,' he said. I looked out the window and said: 'Well! They must have widened the road. I live near here and I hardly recognize it.' 'Do you mind showing me that pass?' the M.P. asked. I went through all my pockets. 'I must have left it in my fatigues. Excited, you know, seeing the folks again.' He drove the car through the main gate at the post and I was sure I was headed for the nearest rockpile. I could see just as clear as anything a great big P, for prisoner, painted on the seat of my pants. I closed my eyes and slid down in the seat."

Pausing, I gulped down half my beer.

"Go on," Mr. Foster urged. "Tell us what happened."

"Well," I continued, "the M.P. looked at me severely and said: 'What's your barracks number, soldier?' '3121,' I said. I sat up straight. 'You mean you're not going to turn me in?' He stopped the car in front of my barracks and, reaching

across my lap, opened the door. 'Get out of here,' he said. 'I have work to do.' " I smiled around the table. "And that, ladies and gentlemen, was my one and only brush with the forces of law and order."

Everybody laughed and Clyde and Colley began to match stories of their own. Before we knew it, a couple of hours had gone by.

When we left to go back to Old Farms, Mr. and Mrs. Foster invited us to spend a weekend at their home. Then they saw us on the bus back to school.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

OLD FARMS had become like home to me. I was confident there, and sure of myself. For every mistake I made, a hundred other men were making one. We could tease each other there, understand and appreciate one another. Leaving Old Farms was like nothing I'd ever known before. I felt lonely and more than a little afraid. Old Farms had been my world, small, comfortable, and safe. The world outside would be different: huge, frightening, and perhaps even hostile.

Somebody told me once: "You fellows with the dark glasses and the white canes always look as if you're hunting for something."

Well, we are. We're hunting for the patience and comfort that were a part of Old Farms and not a part of anything else in the world. Like a child who moves away from his home, I wondered if I'd ever find poise and composure again.

It made me jittery and apprehensive to know that while at Old Farms we were normal, almost anywhere else we were blind men. I'd adjusted to being a blind soldier; I'd adjusted to being a blind veteran; now I had to adapt myself to being just another blind man.

I wondered about some of my buddies. They seemed content enough at the school, but what about life on the outside? I wished I could look in on them all in a year or so. Some of them would find that it was hell on the outside. Maybe I'd be one of them. I didn't think so, but I honestly didn't know. I thought Foley, Colley, even Barron would make out well; but men like Ralph Kane, whose precarious balance had been upset by the death of his wife, and Al Stuart, another trainee, who tee-

tered on the brink of fear all the time, were in for a rude awakening. Old Farms spelled safety. No one gave you a second glance, so to speak; you were just another G.I. Joe. On the outside there was bound to be disappointment and plenty of heartache. Most of the graduates lived normal and useful lives. In fact, none of them had been reduced to the stage of selling apples and pencils. But I'd heard a doctor say that our blindness would take its toll on all of us psychologically. "It's like a bump under the carpet," he said. "You can push it down in one place, but it will only pop up in another."

As the day of departure grew closer, I could feel the apprehension in the air. We even envied the new trainees coming in. It was April, and spring would just be coming to New England. Even though I couldn't see, it seemed like the right time to be getting out, the beginning of something for nature and for me. The training program had been the best that money could provide. We'd had to

cultivate productivity and independence, we'd had to overcome lack of confidence and awkwardness, we'd taken travel tests and sensory tests, and studied plain old-fashioned book-learning. Seeing with the mind instead of the eye can be expected only after an enormous amount of adjustment.

The men were being given last-minute instructions. There was packing to be done and letters to write. Automatically defiance and something like bluster began to creep into the conversation.

On the last day Colley came in to say good-by. "Best of luck, Barry. Don't let anyone out there get you down. Now you can wish me luck. I'm on my way to good old Kentucky, where I shall show them the modern blind man in operation. With all this training under my belt, I'll lay them in the aisles. When I fall down the stairs or trip over the curbstone, I shall smile sweetly and say nothing. When people ask the person I'm with how I'm feeling, or how many sugars I want in my coffee, I shall smile sweetly and say nothing. And when

some character says: 'It's a wonder what they can do—why, they're almost as normal as we are,' do you know what I'll do?"

"Smile sweetly and say nothing?" I asked, laughing.

"Like heck," said Colley. "I'll blow my stack completely and forget all the training I ever had."

"Terrific," I said. "I'll probably read about you some day."

"In what? The Braille Gazette?"

"Well, Colley, I'll be seeing you."

He took my hand and shook it hard. "Yeah, boy. I'll be seeing you."

That was the last time I ever spoke to Colley. A great person. It seems funny to think that I wouldn't know him if I saw him.

A couple of other men dropped in while I packed. Not all of them were as cheerful as Colley. One fellow, Al Stuart, was so frightened at the thought of leaving Old Farms that his voice shook when he spoke.

“What are they going to do to us out there, Barry?”

“Forget it, Al. We’ll make out.”

“I don’t think I could stand it if someone gave me that ‘poor, poor man’ routine,” Al said.

“Well, somebody will. There are fools everywhere.”

Al hesitated, then he said: “I’ve only been home once since I lost my sight, Barry. It was awful.”

I stopped packing and turned toward him. “Why?”

“People forgot that I couldn’t see. That sounds funny, but it’s hard to explain. I mean, I don’t want to be pitied or patronized or any of those things, but having people forget that you’re blind is so frustrating.”

I thought back to my leave and remembered how flattered I’d been when people forgot I couldn’t see.

“If I asked for something,” Al went on, “they’d tell me it was on the table. That’s a big help, isn’t

it? Or they'd put something down and say, 'There it is, Al, old man.' Where, for crying out loud? They acted as if I were a mind-reader or something. Either that or they'd fall over their fat feet waiting on me. That always makes me feel like a moron."

Remembering what Foley had told me way back in Valley Forge, I said: "Time and a little patience will take care of everything, Al."

He snorted. "Time and patience! I don't think I have enough of either."

"Cut it out," I said. "You're just feeling sorry for yourself."

He laughed sheepishly. "Yeah, I guess I am. Is that so bad?"

"It is if you overdo it."

I launched into my own private pep-talk. "Look, Al," I said, "you're only as blind as you want to be, as blind as you let yourself be. A man doesn't have to have eyes to see. People don't mean to be nuisances. They think they're helping you. When

somebody sticks in your craw, just say to yourself: 'The poor man means well.' Most of them do, you know."

"Yeah, but don't you ever feel like kicking somebody's teeth down his throat?"

"Of course I do. But I'm going to keep telling myself what I just told you until it sinks in."

Al laughed and stood up. "Thanks, Barry," he said. "I think I feel better already."

"That's dubious praise if I ever heard any. Well, think nothing of it. Look me up sometime at the nearest theological school—for girls."

"Good luck, sarge," he said, shaking my hand. "I hope you learn to practice what you preach."

"So do I. So long, Al, and good luck."

I went down to the waiting-room. On the way the big stone corridors echoed with the sound of footsteps and voices. I stopped several times to shake hands and say good-by to my buddies. We all tried our feeble best to joke and laugh, but it wasn't easy.

Finally there came the crunch of wheels on the gravel drive and the big bus that was to take us into town stopped at the door. Everyone was strangely quiet. I could hear scuffling feet, the scratch of a match, a door slamming somewhere, the bus engine turning over, a burst of nervous laughter. The M.P.'s cleared the way for us. I went up the bus steps, groped for a seat, and sat with my shoulders squarely against the leather.

With a grinding of gears, we pulled away from Old Farms for the last time.

In three hours I was home again. The trip had seemed endless, but it had given me time to think. There are a lot of angles to this thing called blindness. I had a job to dream about and a wife—I still had enough faith to think someone would fall in love with me—and my sons and just plain people.

I'd met plenty of weird ones since I'd lost my eyesight. Probably Henry Barry with eyes would have thought that most of them were normal people, but being blind gave me an insight that see-

ing never could. It's like this: you can see and along comes a girl. She's blonde with blue eyes and a lovely figure. She has on a mink coat and a pert little hat. Right away you think: "That's for me!" Then you can't see and you meet a girl. For all you know, she could be four foot two, have green hair, and three hands. But her voice is low and pleasant; she seems intelligent and her skin is soft. She doesn't patronize and she doesn't pity. So you like her a lot. All of a sudden it's the real things that matter.

I've met others who thought it was funny to play jokes on a blind man. One time somebody actually gave me a cigarette that was lighted on both ends.

Other people have treated me with condescension. The nothing's-too-good-for-you-blind-boys type. That remark is usually followed by a stunning blow on the back.

Then, of course, there was the other extreme: "Barry, you don't know how lucky you are. A nice fat check from the government every month, a soft

job, everyone waiting on you. Why, if you had to pay my taxes and slave your life away like I do—” and so on, as long as anyone will listen.

In my V.A. area, the Boston area, the Veterans Association had a good reputation. Even the most picayune gripes apparently received the utmost attention and investigation. I’d feel safe there, knowing they’d see to my comfort and well-being. They’d keep tabs on me, even if it wasn’t necessary. One vet had told me that there were three types of men in to see the big boss, General William Blake. The first type, he said, was the big politician, the one who thinks he can get anything by pull. Second, there’s the belligerent type, the man who wants to pull the place down around your ears. And the third, he said, is the little man who comes in with his hat in his hand because his wife told him that if he didn’t get to the top man that very day, he needn’t bother to come home. “That man,” the general said, “is the man I want to see. He’s the fellow who only comes to me as a

last resort, but he's the one who deserves whatever we can do for him."

I hoped I wouldn't fall into any of these categories, but it was a relief to know there was an outfit like the Boston V.A. backing me up.

Shortly after the train pulled out of the Hartford station, two people walked by my seat. One of them, a woman, started to take the seat next to mine; then, as she noticed me, she gave a gasp of repulsion. Hurriedly she and her companion moved down the car. I couldn't see her, but her snort of disgust reminded me of something that had happened in the war, when our outfit attacked the French city of Rennes. It had been late in the afternoon when we arrived, and we were met with some opposition. Orders came through to dig in for the night. By morning the opposition had been withdrawn. Our platoon happened to be in the lead as we walked down the main street of Rennes. The women cried when they saw American soldiers and the men had yelled themselves hoarse.

The church bells rang. Children came into the streets and danced around us, and it seemed as if all the girls in town had flowers to toss at us as we went by. In the residential section of the city the column came to a halt for a moment. During the halt my wandering eye caught the eye of an attractive girl standing on a porch. On her face was a look of utter disgust and repulsion. When she saw me looking at her, her eyes hardened and her lips curled in a sneer. Deliberately she tossed her head and spat on the sidewalk. Then she turned and went into the house.

The woman on the train and the girl in Rennes were like ruts on a well-paved road; their obvious disgust at the sight of me left me bewildered and defiant.

For a few moments I sat tensely, keyed up; then I began to laugh at myself. I'd got the cold shoulder when I could see; why not when I couldn't see? Even with eyes I hadn't been any raving beauty.

Suddenly I realized that I was laughing at my-

self. Something had happened to me that was unpleasant, yet I was laughing. I'd heard it said that if a blind man could laugh at himself, he had been successfully rehabilitated.

Many of the Avon graduates had written amusing letters to the men who were still there. One fellow wrote that he'd taken up quail-hunting. He said that on his first trip he'd failed to bag any quail, but had managed to shoot one of the finest hunting dogs in the state of Oklahoma. Another wrote that he had discovered a new taste thrill. "It happens," he wrote, "when you're eating clams and dip one into the ashtray instead of the melted butter."

In the three hours it took to get home, I more or less settled down inside. I began to feel prepared and armed for the future. The metamorphosis occurred gradually, but definitely. Somehow I felt rich with knowledge about myself and what I had to face. I was ready, like a diamond that someone

has painstakingly cut, polished, and prepared for mounting.

For a week I didn't do anything but luxuriate in the feel of being home. The boys came to see me every day. To them I was simply their wonderful dad. The limitations I may have had as a father never seemed to enter their minds. Their complete acceptance of me as I was stood at the core of my well-being. I remembered the story of the blind vet who had heard his little girl arguing with a neighbor's child about their fathers. The vet's daughter had won the argument by yelling witheringly: "Why, your father isn't even blind."

Day by day I became more adept at recognizing footsteps and voices. Grooming myself, eating, and getting about grew easier and easier.

At the end of the week I went to the Boston V.A. to see a Mr. Raleigh, an official there, to whom Mr. Grayson had given me a letter when I left Old Farms. Mr. Raleigh explained that arrangements were being made for me to take a Civil Service

examination. Just before I left his office, he said, "Just a minute, Mr. Barry. I don't know how you're going to feel about this, but I'm sorry to say that we can't give you any special favors or consideration."

"I don't expect any, Mr. Raleigh," I said. "For that matter, I don't want any. I want to take the test the same as anybody else."

Mr. Raleigh gripped my hand. "Glad you feel that way about it, Barry. You came very highly recommended by Mr. Grayson. Somebody from the V.A. will be out to see you in a few days." As I left, he said: "You know, if you pass this examination, I may be able to place you with one of our divisions. How does that sound?"

"Great," I said enthusiastically. "You'll never know what it will mean to me to go to work again. Not too long ago I thought it was impossible, and look at me now."

Shortly after I'd taken the examination, Roy Nightingale, a friend of mine, drove the boys and

me down to the South Shore. I wanted to rent a little summer camp. When we got to Coonapoissett, we stopped at several places that had for-rent signs on them, but no one was willing to take what they called "the responsibility" for me. One such place was owned by a Mrs. Laski. Roy rang the doorbell, and in a few seconds the door opened and a woman's voice said: "You gents come to see about the camp?"

I told her that we had.

"Come in," she said.

Roy guided me a few steps and I sat down on a lumpy, musty-smelling couch.

Mrs. Laski spoke directly in front of me. "You're blind, ain't ya?"

"Yes."

"And you're wantin' to rent my little house on the ocean?"

"That's the general idea.

"Those two kids out in the car belong to you?"

“Why, yes, they do.”

“Where’s your missis?”

I began to get hot under the collar. “I have no wife.”

Mrs. Laski snorted derisively. “I ain’t aimin’ to take care of two kids and no blind man all summer.”

Sweat broke out on my palms. “Nobody has to take care of us, Mrs. Laski,” I said tightly. “The boys and I are quite capable of looking after ourselves, I’m willing to pay what you’ve asked for summer rental. Your responsibility to me ends when we sign the lease.”

Roy spoke up quickly. “You don’t have to worry about Mr. Barry, Mrs. Laski. He can take care of himself as well as you or I.”

“You ain’t signin’ no lease with me. I ain’t lookin’ after no blind man and his two kids,” she repeated stubbornly.

I turned to Roy. “Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

I rose and started across the room. Roy came after me and I took hold of his arm.

“Well, you don’t have to be so rude about it,” Mrs. Laski muttered.

I turned toward her voice. “Sorry, but we’d better try somewhere else.”

As we went to the car, Mrs. Laski trailed us to the door. “I ain’t lookin’ after no blind man,” she called after us. “Try Mrs. Macy, down the road.”

We tried Mrs. Macy. We tried her and Mrs. Packard and Mrs. Cline. Mr. Roche turned us down and so did Mr. Higgenson.

Finally Roy said: “Come on, Barry, there are other places we can try besides Coonapoissett.”

“Nothing doing, Roy,” I said. “I used to swim here when I was growing up and I’m going to spend the summer here now. Listen,” I kidded him, “you can’t shake this boy. I’ve acquired a tenacity a bull would envy.”

“Are we really going swimming, Dad?” Junior asked incredulously.

“You bet we are. We’re going to do all the things I’ve wanted to do since before the war.” I felt dreamy, thinking about it. “We’re going to swim and row and lie in the sun. You and Don will have to be my navigators. And in between times I’m not going to do anything.”

Toward the end of the day we came to a little cottage with a sign on it that read: “Apply to Mrs. Helen Dunston.” The address was in Coonapoissett.

“Let’s give this one a try,” I said. “If Mrs. Dunston throws us out, we’ll let it go for today.”

Roy drove up in front of her house and we went to the door. Mrs. Dunston herself answered the ring and ushered us inside. Within a few minutes, we had signed the lease. As Mrs. Dunston let us out she said: “Now remember, Mr. Barry, if you need anything just have one of the boys call.”

At home again, there was word that someone from the V.A. had called me. I jumped for the phone. When the connection had been made and

I had identified myself, a man's cheerful voice said: "Well, Barry, when would you like to start work?"

For a second I couldn't answer. Then I said: "I passed it—my Civil Service examination?"

"With flying colors, Barry."

I put the phone back in its cradle and walked out to the front stoop. The cheerful voice had given me the summer to relax in, then four days of classes in the fall and a job in the local V.A. office.

Outside, night and day were just coming together. It was warm and quiet. I stood as straight as I could and looked up into the sky. Right then I think I could see the stars.

## A NOTE ON THE TYPE

*The text of this book is set in Caledonia, a Linotype face designed by W. A. DWIGGINS, the man responsible for so much that is good in contemporary book design and typography. Caledonia belongs to the family of printing types called "modern face" by printers—a term used to mark the change in style of type-letters that occurred about 1800. It has all the hard-working feet-on-the-ground qualities of the Scotch Modern face plus the liveliness and grace that is integral in every Dwiggins "product" whether it be a simple catalogue cover or an almost human puppet.*

*The book was composed, printed, and bound by H. WOLFF, New York.*















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I'll be seeing you.

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[continued from front flap]

*And*, finally, of what use will he be to himself and to the world? Will he learn to make a living? How will he acquire new skills? Where can he be trained? Can he ever be a whole man again?

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F R O M

# I'll be seeing you

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The doctor left quickly and I lay there thinking of what he'd said. "Hopeless" was the word he'd used—hopeless, totally blind. I tried desperately to keep from panicking, but the doctor hadn't left so much as a loophole. Why hadn't I been prepared for this possibility? Why had I been told that I was only blind in one eye? I was blind, blind, blind.

Terror started at the edge of my mind and spread like a stain across it. . . . Later I started to remember. . . . I remembered that fellow in my home town who tapped his way along with a white cane. Everybody knew him. People stared and the children followed him. I had helped him across the street one day, scared to death that he'd trip on something and that I'd get the blame. I hadn't known what to say to him and was relieved when we reached the other side of the street because I'd felt so helpless. I remembered wondering if the fellow was as tragic as he looked, tapping his lonely way along the sidewalk.

*Is a blind man as tragic as he looks?*

*In this inspiring human document Henry Barry gives one blind man's courageous answer.*

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